

UNSCRIPTING PIETY: MUSLIM WOMEN, PAKISTANI NATIONALISM, AND ISLAMIC FEMINISM

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## Abstract

This dissertation analyzes Muslim women's processes of pious subject formation and the intersection of these processes with discourses of Pakistani nationalism and Islamic feminism. Drawing primarily on interviews and participatory observations with Pakistani women in Karachi, Islamabad, and Mississauga associated with two Sunni Muslim groups, Al-Huda International and the Jamaat-e-Islami, I examine how women comprehend and inhabit their piety in and through the spiritual, social, and political milieu of their everyday lives. I argue that taking up piety while understanding the spiritual as epistemological reveals contradictory and relational dimensions of Muslim women's subjectivities, including complicities with structures of power and relationships with the secular. By taking up religiosity as a way of knowing, this dissertation intervenes in the normative secularity of knowledge production about Muslim women that renders the epistemic dimension of their pious subjectivities unintelligible.

To explicate what analytical openings are enabled by taking up the spiritual as epistemological, I look at how the women I conducted research with conceptualize their piety and how their Islamic discourse coalesces, contradicts and co-exists with dominant discourses of Islam, religio-nationalism, and universal rights-based feminism. I begin with an exploration of the spaces created for Muslim women through Al-Huda and the Jamaat and what these spaces meant to the women I met. I juxtapose my respondents' Islamic praxis with a discourse analysis of Pakistani religio-nationalism and rights-based Islamic feminism that also stake a claim on defining the relationship between women and Islam. These discursive structures of nationalism and feminism anchor analyses of Muslim women's piety in secular epistemologies that render practices such as veiling or the *qawwam* (authoritative

status) of men, for example, in secular terms. Focusing on how the women I interviewed conceptualize *qawwam*, I elucidate the paradoxical processes by which they implement an ostensible gendered hierarchy, often in face of resistant men, in their everyday lives. I then turn to how their piety is complicit with structures of power by examining how the focus on scripture in their literalist Islamic praxis secures a rational subject of piety.

## **Dedication**

To my dearest parents,  
Suriaya and Zafar

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## Introduction: Unscripting Piety

*“Bismillah ir-rahman ir-rahim.”*<sup>1</sup> In the name of God, the most beneficent, the most merciful”. These were the purposefully recited words with which Malala Yousafzai<sup>2</sup> began her speech at the United Nations General Assembly on July 12<sup>th</sup>, 2013. Standing at the podium with her head loosely covered, Malala delivered a speech that has, for many, come to epitomize what it means to speak up and stand up for your rights in face of religious extremism. However, despite Malala’s recurring and habitual references to Islam, her piety is rendered as parenthetical to her activism in dominant feminist and human rights discourses. International human rights organizations and mainstream media narratives,<sup>3</sup> for example, characterize her commitment to the values of equality and education as a

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<sup>1</sup> The transliteration of Urdu and Arabic words in this dissertation attends to the pronunciations of the words when they were used in speech, with the exception of instances where they are in reference to the usage in cited texts, for example, Saba Mahmood (2005) uses *da’wa* movement to refer to an Egyptian piety movement. Arabic words such as *da’wa* can also be transliterated as *dawah*, with the the apostrophe signifying the absence or presence of the letter *ain*. In vernacular pronunciations of Arabic words by the Urdu and English speaking women I conducted research with, the *ain* is rarely present in speech.

<sup>2</sup> Malala is a Pakistani Pashtun woman from the Swat valley who was shot at point blank range on her school bus on October 9<sup>th</sup>, 2012 when she was 15 years old. This excerpt is from Malala’s first public speech after the incident. The Swat contingent of the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan took responsibility for the attack stating that they wanted to send a message deterring the spread of Western culture and secularist ideas in the Swat valley. Malala had become a threat to their project of implementing what they understood to be Islamic law because of her increasingly prominent activism in Pakistan for access to education for girls. She survived the attack and continued her activism in partnership with international development organizations such as the United Nations Global Education First Initiative and Because I am a Girl.

<sup>3</sup> Narrative that were articulated, for instance, in the international accolades she received that valorize her resistance to extremism. The 2014 Nobel Peace Prize was awarded to Malala because of her “struggle for education and against extremism” (“The Nobel,” 2014). In naming her “Woman of the Year”, Glamour magazine cited UN secretary general, Ban Ki-moon, in describing how she stood up to “extremists” (Leive, 2013). Time Magazine noted her “determination to not allow the Taliban...to prevent her from getting the education she needed to realize her dreams” in their description of her as one of the “100 most influential people in the world” (Clinton, 2013). International women’s rights organizations like Women Living Under Muslim Laws, wrote to express how they “stand with [Malala] to fight against the extremism which blocks these advances [in girls’ empowerment]” and that she is a “true hero” in the struggle for human rights (Bennoune, 2014).

testament to her commitment to universal human rights discourse, and not to Islam.<sup>4</sup> That is, the role of Malala's religiosity in shaping the way she understands the issue of girl's education and her own experiences of violence finds little resonance in these narratives. Instead, implicit in these affirmations of Malala as a symbol of the struggle for women's and children's rights is the cordoning off of her Muslim subjectivity as separate from her activism. This perceived separation is what makes the visible and explicit markers of her piety, such as her loosely covered head and her habitual opening of speeches with "*bismillah*", compatible with the normative secularity of human rights discourses. In other words, Malala is a palatable symbol of human rights activism because she is seen as rehearsing secular scripts of religiosity.<sup>5</sup> References to Islam that are peppered throughout her speeches and interviews are bracketed in order to consolidate her as a beacon for human rights activism in face of Islamic extremism and, relatedly, as a secular subject of modernity.

While the effacement of Malala's piety enables the construction of her as a heroic human rights activist in the West,<sup>6</sup> in other instances, the hypervisibility and

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<sup>4</sup> In her speech at the UN General Assembly, she makes clear that her ideas of "equality" stem from her understanding of Islam when she says: "thank you to God for whom we all are equal" (Yousafzai, 2013). She also understands education as an "Islamic duty" (Yousafzai, 2014a) and cites the Quran in explaining why she believes education is important: "'read' is the first word of the Quran" (Yousafzai, 2014b).

<sup>5</sup> See chapter two for a discussion of the secular and secular scripts of religiosity.

<sup>6</sup> Notably, Malala is also a fraught figure for many Pakistanis because she elides the dichotomized understanding of anti-Taliban politics where being against the Taliban is synonymous with allegiance to the military. That Malala simultaneously critiques the Pakistani military and the Taliban is messy for some, but these are critiques that are grounded in her experiences as a Pashtun in Pakistan. The constant questioning of her allegiance to Islam and Pakistan echo prevalent forms of racialization and marginalization of the Pashtun in Pakistan. Malala's Pashtun identity provides the rhetorical grounds for excluding her from the category of Muslim. Despite her overt practices of piety and her proclamations of faith, she cannot be embraced as an ideal gendered Muslim citizen-subject in nationalist discourse because she is Pashtun. Instead, she is smeared as a pawn of the West in order to undermine her inconvenient formulation of anti-Taliban politics. The suspicions cast over her expressions of piety thus dovetail with the exclusionary nationalist construction of the Muslim citizen-subject of Pakistan.

essentialization of Muslim women's practices of piety are used to construct them as victims and/or pawns of Islamic patriarchy. In Western foreign policy, for example, constructions of Islam as oppressive to women mobilize visible practices of piety such as veiling and *purdah* as evidence of gender inequality and segregation.<sup>7</sup> The discursive power and contemporary currency of labels such as 'fundamentalist', 'radical', and 'extremist' makes it difficult to dislodge such gendered Islamic practices from Islamophobic and orientalist discourses of terrorism. Feminist organizations that are committed to a universal conceptualization of women's rights often utilize essentialized, truncated, and reductive understandings of women's relationships to Islam to analyze the extent to which Islamic practices of piety obstruct the realization of universal human rights.<sup>8</sup> In the context of Pakistan, which is one of the sites of my research, many feminist organizations draw on such universal women's rights discourses to fight against the Pakistani state's instrumentalization of gendered markers of piety, which have been paramount in articulating the nation-state as Islamic and constructing the ideal Muslim citizen-subject. Even as such analyses and narrativizations of Muslim women's relationships with Islam are fixated on some markers of piety, there is a continued resistance to engage with Muslim women and their multiple, relational, and nuanced conceptualizations and lived experiences of Islamic piety.

In this dissertation, I engage with twenty-five Pakistani Sunni Muslim women affiliated with two Islamic organizations, Al-Huda International and the Jamaat-e-Islami,

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<sup>7</sup> *Purdah* refers to the practice of limiting or forbidding the interactions of women with men outside of their immediate families. For some, *purdah* results in a rigid relegation of women to private/domestic spaces, for others, *purdah* can be upheld through practices of veiling and modesty. For more on Western foreign policy and Muslim women, see Abu-Lughod (2002), Razack (2004), Thobani (2010), Toor (2011), and Puar (2007).

<sup>8</sup> See chapters one and two.

located in three cities, Karachi, Islamabad, and Mississauga. I draw on how they conceptualize and practice their piety in order to explicate the epistemological impasses in knowledge production about Islam and Muslim women. The Jamaat-e-Islami is a Pakistani religio-political party that has historically engaged in propagating their Islamic discourse through grassroots activities such as organizing opportunities for learning about Islam in residential neighbourhoods and circulating print material. The Jamaat-e-Islami also has a women's wing in Pakistan that engages in similar activities but is led by women (Jamal, 2013). Farhat Hashmi, a former student and affiliate of the Jamaat, started Al-Huda International in the 1990s as a space for Islamic learning exclusively for women in Pakistan and has since developed into an international institution of Islamic education and welfare services. Al-Huda and the Jamaat also disseminate their Islamic discourse through a variety of print, audio, and digital materials. Al-Huda's activities largely target women but they also have schools and publications for children and teenagers. The organization is popularly associated with a 'conservative' turn particularly in upper class women's practices of piety (S. Ahmad, 2009). Since the 1990s, both these organizations have seen increasing participation from women in the multiple opportunities they provide for Islamic learning in Pakistan and in the Pakistani diaspora.<sup>9</sup> This dissertation focuses on women affiliated with these organizations as well as women who participate in piety groups that have emerged as a result of Al-Huda and the Jamaat's efforts to spread their Islamic discourse.

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<sup>9</sup> The increasing popularity of Al-Huda and affiliates of the Jamaat in Canada has also been met with increasing Islamophobic state regulation including stripping organizations of charitable status, accusations of inciting extremism, and hate speech (see chapter one).

Although Al-Huda and the Jamaat are separate and distinct organizations, both are influenced by the teachings of Maulana Abdul Ala Maududi, the prominent Islamic scholar who emphasized a individual, literal, and more comprehensive engagement with the truth of the Quran (S. Ahmad, 2009; Jamal, 2013). Thus, Al-Huda and the Jamaat expound similar Islamic discourses and processes of pious subject formation, albeit with some key differences in their positions on matters such as political participation and strategies for disseminating their message. Both organizations have made considerable efforts to reach women by providing accessible opportunities for women to increase their knowledge of Islam and develop and refine their practices of piety – arguably, transforming the relationship between many women and Islam, which has particular significance in the religio-nationalist context of Pakistan. Many women described their former engagements with Islam through, for example, the Arabic recitation of the Quran without attending to its translation and exegesis, as “superficial” or “empty”. All of the women I interviewed came to participate in these organizations through home-based study circles or Quran classes held in their neighbourhoods or within their social circles in Karachi, Islamabad, and Mississauga.<sup>10</sup>

In many ways, the approach to Islam popularized through these organizations clashes with normative ideals of rights-based feminism as well as nationalist ideals of gendered piety. For example, many Pakistani feminists and human rights activists, such as those in the Women’s Action Forum (WAF),<sup>11</sup> characterize women associated with such

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<sup>10</sup> See chapter one for more information about Al-Huda and the Jamaat.

<sup>11</sup> The Women’s Action Forum is an umbrella organization that includes several women’s rights organizations, each of which specializes in different aspects of women’s rights such as political representation, legal services, legislative activism, advocacy, health, and education. These organizations draw

Islamic discourses as victims or pawns of patriarchy because of their adherence to what some might call a literalist or traditionalist approach to Islam, which they perceive to be a patriarchal and anti-women Islamic discourse (Jamal, 2005a). The historical development of the women's rights movement and the mobilization of universal human rights discourse in Pakistan is closely tied to state instrumentalizations of religio-nationalist discourse that have been detrimental to women and sexual and religious minorities. As such, preoccupations with these struggles against the Pakistani state results in women's rights organizations deeming the Islamic discourses of women associated with Al-Huda and the Jamaat as antithetical to feminist organizing because they do not directly problematize or contest the religio-nationalist state's failure to guarantee and protect women's rights. For instance, embodied practices of piety, such as wearing the *hijab*, *abaya*, and *niqab*,<sup>12</sup> promoted in Al-Huda and the Jamaat's Islamic discourse have raised concerns about the extent to which these organizations dovetail with the Pakistani state's practices of moral regulation of women's bodies in Pakistan. However, these concerns elide an understanding of the nuances of women's relationships with religio-nationalist discourse, including their complicities and contestations, that are shaped by their Islamic discourse and everyday practices of piety.

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on secular universal human rights discourse in their fight for women's rights in Pakistan (see chapter two and three).

<sup>12</sup> The *hijab* is a headscarf that is employed in different ways in different Muslim communities. In the practices of piety of the women I met, it mostly referred to covering their head and chest in the presence of men who were not their sons, fathers, husbands, or brothers. For a few women, it referred more generally to a notion of modesty that did not require covering their head. A large majority of the women I conducted research with employed the *hijab* as a headscarf. The *abaya* is a loose buttoned-down, body-length, long-sleeved coat that several women I met wore mostly in public spaces. The *niqab* is a face-covering that only reveals the eyes. Some of the women I met were in the practice of wearing the *niqab* and nearly all the women I met desired to eventually wear it. Interestingly, none of the women I met referred to their practices of veiling as *burka*, a veil covering the whole body.

I argue that these analytical foreclosures of the kind of Islamic piety promoted by organizations like Al-Huda and the Jamaat are the result of the normative secularity of knowledge production. Analytical frameworks that employ secularized categories of analysis render the epistemic dimension of religious or spiritual subjectivities as unintelligible. That is, they gloss over how different women derive their subjectivities from, give meaning to, and participate in these Islamic discourses. Secular analytics preclude an engagement with how Muslim women conceptualize their practices of piety as part of processes of pious subject formation. Instead, analyses of Muslim women's practices of piety are anchored in the secular epistemology of nationalist, feminist, and/or human rights discourse rendering practices such as veiling, for example, in secular terms. Secular renderings of such practices work with scripts of piety that efface how some women give meaning to these practices through spiritual epistemologies. In other words, secular modes of knowledge production fail to consider how religiosity operates as a way knowing. I contend that taking up the spiritual as epistemological unravels reductive and truncating analytical framings that elide the complex and multiple dimensions of women's subjectivities, including their complicities with structures of power and relationships with the secular.

This dissertation focuses on the everyday experiences of women engaged, to varying degrees and in varying ways, with the Islamic discourse mobilized and disseminated through Al-Huda and the Jamaat. As such, it is not a comprehensive account of these organizations per se. This focus on the women who participate in these spaces, grounded in their everyday practice of Islam, contributes to an emic analysis of piety, foregrounding how these women themselves understand their Islamic praxis and how it coalesces,



contradicts and co-exists with dominant discourses of Islam, nationalism, and universal rights-based feminism. I rely on interviews and participatory observations conducted over eight months in 2012 with twenty-five women who participate in Al-Huda and Jamaat piety groups in Karachi, Islamabad, and Mississauga.<sup>13</sup> I utilized semi-structured open-ended interview methods that resulted in extended conversations with a number of my interlocutors, and many women shared intimate details of their everyday lives in the interview process. This included stories about their relationships with other women in their groups, struggles to be more pious, relationships with their families, everyday routines and habits, relationships with their domestic workers, and more. During my research, I also gleaned observations about their Islamic discourse and practices of piety by participating in several discussion sessions, lectures, classes, and social gatherings, where the interviewees participated in group discussions, teaching and learning, and social interactions. These methods enabled an understanding of the intersectional and layered implications of the spiritual in the everyday lives of the women I conducted research with.

Drawing on these interviews and participatory observations, I examine the limitations posed by secular epistemological frameworks in understanding the practices of piety emerging out of their Islamic discourses and explore what analytical openings are enabled by taking up the spiritual as epistemological. I further explore the foreclosures produced through Pakistani religio-nationalist and feminist discourses using archival materials such as public speeches by Pakistani state figures, state mandated curricula, and print literature, toolkits, and resources produced by women's rights organizations. The epistemological frameworks shaping these discourses preempt an engagement with the

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<sup>13</sup> See chapter one for an explanation of why I chose these sites.

processes of Islamic subject formation of the women I conducted research with and, in addition, they foreclose an analysis of how these processes are implicated within interlaced structures of power. I look at how the women I met comprehend their practices of piety and how they inhabit these practices in and through the spiritual, social, and political milieu of their everyday lives.

Chapter one provides organizational and socio-political significance of Al-Huda International and the Jamaat-e-Islami as organizations and the ways in which the women I met engaged with the women-only spaces created through these organizations and their pedagogical structures. I draw on women's descriptions of their experiences in these spaces to elucidate the multiple and varied ways in which these spaces were made significant in and through these women's lived experiences. Several women described how these spaces gave them a sense of ownership of their religiosity, a multi-layered sense of belonging and community, and a sense of authority over their knowledge of Islam. The advancement of Islamic knowledge and practices of piety thus occur alongside the development of women-only spaces. This chapter also examines how the advancement of their knowledge of Islam is constituted through pedagogical structures and spaces that appeal to the sensibilities of Pakistani urban upper classes. For many women, formal pedagogical structures and a literalist approach to Islam were a testament to the legitimacy, authenticity and purity of the content of their learning. In other words, what women learn through Al-Huda and Jamaat spaces is as significant as how they learn it. This chapter explores connections between what women learn, how they learn it, and how it shapes their sense of ownership, belonging, and authority.

In chapter two, I provide a theoretical and methodological framework that grapples with issues of epistemology and knowledge production that emerge at the intersection of piety, nationalism, and feminism. I unpack the normative secularity of some of the central analytical categories in knowledge production about Islam and Muslim women – ‘religion’, ‘Islam’, ‘feminism’, ‘women’, ‘agency’ – in order to make space for taking seriously the notions of the sacred informing the processes of subject formation of the women I conducted research with. Furthermore, I suggest shifting the conversation from whether or not Muslim women have agency and where they draw their agency from, to how we can locate their agency within interlaced structures of power. I formulate this shift as a recognition of how analyses of Muslim women are not only limited by the way the aforementioned categories of analysis are constructed, but also how analyses are limited to these categories as though these were the only categories that are relevant to their praxis.

I juxtapose my respondents’ notions of piety discussed in chapter two with those articulated within debates on women’s relationships with Pakistani religio-nationalist discourse in chapter three. I explicate the Pakistani state’s exclusionary conception of the Muslim citizen-subject and how women’s rights groups have responded to this exclusion. Through an examination of nationalist discourse, I make visible some of the Pakistani state mechanisms and discourses employed to gender piety and produce the Muslim citizen-subject as male. The Pakistani state’s articulations of women’s piety focus on the symbolic currency of Muslim women in nationalist discourse which is intertwined with the regulation of women in multiple ways through state apparatuses. These conceptualizations of women’s piety emphasize bodily comportment, sexual regulation, and public propriety, as though these are the only parts of Islam that are relevant to women. Women’s rights

organizations and movements have agitated against these religio-nationalist prerogatives by crafting a form of Islamic feminism in an effort to dissipate the legitimating power of 'Islam' as mobilized by the Pakistani state. These reclamations of 'Islam', however, occurred in tandem with a commitment to universal human rights discourse and produced their own scripts of religiosity for women. This chapter traces the development of the Pakistani Muslim citizen-subject and the secular Muslim feminist subject as competing scripts of piety that nevertheless omit formulations of women's relationships with Islam by women in Al-Huda and Jamaat piety groups.

While these women include some of the gendered practices propagated in the Pakistani state's version of Islam in their articulations of piety, they have a different understanding of how and why they need to be practiced. Many women I interviewed understood these practices as one part of Islamic praxis wherein the focus is largely on moral and ethical behaviours and personal and social conduct. Drawing on interviews, chapter four explores how my respondents subvert androcentric nationalist claims on the Muslim citizen-subject and how they set in motion alternative scripts of women's piety. I argue that these women's Islamic discourses contest the androcentric form of piety propagated by the Pakistani state, which claims the Prophet as male and for males, by centralizing the Prophet and the *sunnah*<sup>14</sup> in articulations of women's piety, especially in relation to how they conceptualize ethical social and personal behavior, *akhlaaq*.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> *Sunnah* refers to the Prophet Mohammed's practices of piety, including his social behaviours and interactions, that some Muslims, such as the women I conducted research with, use as a model for emulation.

<sup>15</sup> Related to *sunnah*, *akhlaaq* (or *akhlaaqiat*) refers to moral or ethical personal and social behaviours. The Al-Huda and Jamaat women I met centralized the *sunnah* as a guide for what such behaviours should look like. Their conception of *akhlaaq* encompasses domestic relationships, everyday routines and habits, social conduct in public spaces, amongst other things. See chapter four for an exposition of how the women I met conceptualize *akhlaaq*.

Even as women participating in Al-Huda and Jamaat piety groups work to de-centre the Pakistani state's vision of women's piety, they simultaneously work to sharpen and define Islamic gender relations and women's and men's place within them through their conceptualization of the Islamic concept of *qawwam*. *Qawwam* broadly refers to the notion of men having a higher status and authority over women. Chapter four engages in-depth in how we can understand the role of a gender hierarchy produced through the concept of *qawwam* that is galvanized by women directing the development of their own piety. I locate this analysis in how women define pious social relationships, how they envision ideal relationships between men and women, and how they described their own relationships with the men in their lives. Despite their commitment to developing these gendered relationships, it is important to note that these women also have a strong sense of "equality"; however, they locate equality in the "eyes of Allah". That is, they are firm in the belief that men and women are of equal value in the eyes of Allah and that in the *akhira* (hereafter)<sup>16</sup> and on judgment day women will be subjected to the same level of scrutiny as men. This sense of transcendent equality catalyzes the form that gender relations take and the women-led processes through which *qawwam* is established in the here and now. In other words, understanding women's institution of *qawwam* through their spiritual epistemologies reveals how an ostensible gender hierarchy or a sexual division of labour does not necessarily indicate patriarchal oppression.

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<sup>16</sup> *Akhira* can be translated to the hereafter, afterlife, or, more literally, as the final life. In my respondents' usage, it is a time and space that is distinct from the material world (*dunia*). However, it implicates their lives in the material world through the notion of judgement, where Allah will decide whether one's afterlife will be in heaven (*jannah* in Arabic or *jannat* in Urdu) or hell (*dozakh* in Urdu or *jahannum* in Arabic and Urdu). This judgement would be based on practices of worship and personal and social behaviours in the material world. See chapter four for a discussion of how Al-Huda and Jamaat women I met used this term in relation to developing their piety.

Chapter four also explores the multiple and shifting ways in which women inhabit *qawwam* in their everyday lives. Interestingly, many of the women I met were often the ones teaching the men in their homes how to be proper Muslims, which in their interpretation means that the man has a set of rights and duties associated with his *qawwam*. They describe at length their struggles to achieve personal relationships that abide by their interpretation of *qawwam*, and the corresponding rights and responsibilities, in face of resistant men. Interestingly, spousal relationships emerged as a key site of these contestations in many of the interviews I conducted. Many of the women I met explained that their husbands resisted the idea of structuring their households in accordance with *qawwam*, which would give their husbands ‘authority’ over their wives and the household. Their descriptions of how their husbands articulated their resistances demonstrate the valence of Orientalist and Islamophobic discourses of modernity and backwardness, with gender relations featuring as a central trope. In this chapter I explore these resistances as evidence of the tension between women’s understandings of *qawwam* and the existing form of heteropatriarchal relationships in their households.

Questions of the legitimacy of various forms of Islamic learning loomed large in the discourses of piety amongst the women I conducted research with. Chapter five examines how the legitimizing narratives of Al-Huda and the Jamaat are produced through processes of othering that associate the self with a rational form of piety centered on a methodical and literal engagement with holy texts. I frame this chapter through anecdotes from the weekly *maasi* (domestic worker)<sup>17</sup> class, a special Islamic education and literacy class

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<sup>17</sup> In the usage of the Al-Huda women I conducted research with, *maasi* referred to women domestic workers who were typically employed for cleaning, cooking, laundering, and caretaking. Interestingly, the word *maasi* also means aunt, more specifically, mother’s sister, in Punjabi, Gujarati, and Hindi.

offered for domestic workers employed by students and teachers at Al-Huda. I explore how the *maasi* class is symptomatic of the desire for a “trickle-down” approach where the domestic workers’ existing practices of Islam are rendered invisible or illegitimate in the name of civility and progress. The *maasi* class exemplifies the processes of othering that are linked to how the women I conducted research with mobilize the Islamic concepts of *biddat* (‘innovations’ that are not true to the teachings of the Prophet)<sup>18</sup> and *shirk* (equating someone or something with Allah)<sup>19</sup> to identify and categorize what they believe to be un-Islamic practices. Nearly all the women I met deployed these concepts to characterize and vilify ‘extremists’, members of the ‘lower class’, and those engaged in competing practices of piety. Several women traced the specific manifestation of these practices to the “cultural baggage” from once living amongst Hindus in India. Many women identified a range of practices from visiting shrines of saints to the way weddings are celebrated to common ritualistic gestures as remnants of Hinduism in the cultural and religious fabric of Pakistan. In this chapter, I explore the implications of conceptualizing the distinction between Islam and Hinduism along the lines of a distinction between religion and custom and what this means for constructing a liberal dichotomy between the rational self and the irrational other. Through an elaboration of how women participating in Al-Huda and Jamaat piety groups construct the self in relation to the other, I argue that their forms of piety are complicit in entrenching class, ethnic, and religious social hierarchies.

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<sup>18</sup> In addition to innovation, *biddat* (singular), or *biddatein* (plural), also implies an inauthentic practice of Islam because it is not substantiated through scripture for the women I interviewed. See chapter five for how these women employed this term to construct themselves as rational and learned Muslims by representing others as irrational and illiterate Muslims.

<sup>19</sup> *Shirk* was often mentioned together with *biddat* in relation to practices that the women I met perceived as blasphemous. It referred to a divergence from monotheism, equating someone or something with god or giving someone or something godly qualities. For example, several women understood commemorations of the Prophet Mohammed as blasphemous because they equate the Prophet with Allah.

By focusing on how my respondents articulate and experience their discourses of piety, this dissertation contributes an analysis of the politics of piety that foregrounds the complex and contradictory processes of pious subject formation elucidated through the everyday. Understanding how these particular women describe gender relations, for instance, through the epistemological frameworks of their Islamic discourse reveals aspects of their subjectivity that would be effaced within a secular epistemological framework. At the same time, the focus on the everyday articulation and practice of piety allows for a robust understanding of how these women and their discourses of piety are implicated within social hierarchies. As such, this dissertation produces an analysis of piety that takes up the spiritual as epistemological while also interrogating its complicities in relations of power.



## Chapter 1: “This is mine”: Cultivating intimacies with Islam

*This was the first time I came to know what the Quran was saying...I think [Farhat Hashmi’s] biggest contribution has been that she has given people back a sense of ownership about the Quran. This is mine. I can apply it to my life. This is not something I just study as part of an ancient narrative...So with every verse she connects it with how you can relate it to your life today right now...It was something very new that you relate it to your life and that is how it is supposed to be read...it was a very deep, profound experience for all of us. (Donya)*

As institutions that focus on providing opportunities for women to learn about Islam, both Al-Huda and the Jamaat appealed to many women because of the relationships they cultivated between women and the Quran and *hadith*<sup>20</sup> and the spaces they created for women to develop their piety. The transformation in her relationship to the Quran that Donya, a graduate of Al-Huda’s advanced diploma program in Karachi, describes above came about through the recognition and the claim that “this is mine” and that it can be applied to “my life”, “right now”. To be able to claim the Quran as her own meant that Donya could relate the Quran to her life in more personalized ways. Donya’s expressions of frustrations with the Quran being read as “part of an ancient narrative” refer to how the Quran is often treated as a lofty, flat and static text that has no relevance to most contemporary matters. To be able to apply it to contemporary and everyday issues made the Quran present in her life in intimate and profound ways.

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<sup>20</sup> *Hadith* are compilations of accounts about how the Prophet lived his life witnessed by those closest to him. Some groups use these accounts as exemplifications of ideal ways of practicing Islam to supplement the Quran. There are different compilations of the *hadith* and different groups claim that certain versions are more authentic others. Some groups do not consider *hadith* to be an authoritative text and prefer to focus on the Quran alone. *Hadith* are a central component of the Islamic discourse of Al-Huda and the Jamaat and they primarily draw on the collection of *hadith* in Sahih al-Bukhari. See chapter four for how the women I met employ the *hadith* in their articulations of piety.

This dissertation contributes an understanding of the epistemological implications of the cultivation of such relationships with Islam. The multiple dimensions of space created through Al-Huda and the Jamaat interweave the sacred and the everyday producing an Islamic discourse that emphasizes processes of pious subject formation. These organizations made deliberate efforts to reach women by creating accessible women-only spaces and opportunities for Islamic learning. Notably, these spaces created their own structures of exclusion and privilege as they were limited to urban women from upper and middle classes, which I elaborate on in chapter five. In this chapter, I examine women's experiences of participating in the spaces created or inspired by these organizations in order to provide an understanding of these spaces as the women I interviewed described them. Through women-only spaces and opportunities, Al-Huda and the Jamaat cultivated a sense of ownership of Islam amongst women by making Islamic texts, the study of Islam, and the development of piety accessible to women. Moreover, because Al-Huda and the Jamaat's pedagogical approaches utilized formal educational practices, many women I interviewed legitimized their participation in these spaces through logics of merit and credibility. I examine how these logics and opportunities for women to gain access to and develop ownership of Islamic knowledge transformed their Islamic praxis. Before discussing women's experiences in these spaces, I elaborate on the methodology and research process through which I gleaned women's ideas of these imbrications and these notions of subjectivity.

## **Al-Huda, the Jamaat, and Women's Piety**

Although the focus of this dissertation is the way the women I interviewed understand and inhabit the Islamic discourse disseminated through Al-Huda and the Jamaat, I first provide a brief introduction to these organizations below to contextualize this Islamic discourse and the mechanisms through which it reached the women I interviewed. Al-Huda International and the Jamaat-e-Islami are distinct organizations, however, they share a similar approach to Islam that draws on the teachings of the twentieth century Islamic scholar, Maulana Abdul Ala Maududi. Maududi emphasized a literal, applied, and more comprehensive engagement with the Quran as a panacea for what he perceived to be the weakness of Muslim communities especially in face of colonizing forces (S. Ahmad, 2009; Iqtidar, 2011). His literalist approach was also in opposition to the modernist approach of Maududi's interlocutors, such as Sayyid Ahmad Khan, who advocated a contextual reinterpretation of Islamic scripture to make it compatible with modernity. For Maududi, the strength of a Muslim community could only be established through implementing the "truth" of the Quran. In turn, the "truth" of the Quran, according to Maududi, required a literal understanding that focused on cultivating acceptance of what the Quran says regardless of whether it contradicted normative notions of modernity and progress (S. Ahmad, 2009). This claim to following the literal word of the Quran furnished Maududi's Islamic discourse with a sense of authenticity because, ostensibly, it did not give in to socio-political pressures to change or adjust scripture to attend to contemporary contexts. Indeed, many of the women I conducted research with associated Al-Huda and

the Jamaat's claims to literalism as a signal for a more "authentic" practice of Islam (see chapter five).<sup>21</sup>

Maududi's Islamic ideology gained traction in the 1940s in crafting a Muslim identity, in contra-distinction to Hindu and British identities, as part of anti-colonial struggles in India (Iqtidar, 2011; Jamal, 2013). Influenced by Deobandi<sup>22</sup> Islamic ideology, Maududi established the Jamaat-e-Islami as a political party in pre-partition India in 1941 and led the party for thirty years, focusing on narrowly defining and representing the interests of the Muslim community through statecraft, party politics, proselytization, and community welfare activities (S. Ahmad, 2009; Iqtidar, 2011; Jamal, 2013; Toor, 2011c).<sup>23</sup> The Jamaat became a key player in Pakistani politics during the late 1970s and 1980s when Zia-ul-Haq's military dictatorship instrumentalized them in state-led Islamization programs and in popularizing the American proxy war in Afghanistan as *jihad* (Jamal, 2013, p. 4; Toor, 2011c, p. 127).<sup>24</sup> Many Jamaat leaders also became part of Zia's "nominated parliament"

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<sup>21</sup> At the same time, both the Jamaat and Al-Huda represented a literalist engagement with Islam that did not produce the kind of austere practice associated with groups such as the Tablighi Jamaat and the Jamaat-ud-Dawah (Jamal, 2013). The Tablighi Jamaat and the Jamaat-ud-Dawah are Islamic organizations that have considerable overlaps with the Islamic discourse of the Jamaat-e-Islami but they do not engage in electoral politics. Rather, their focus is on various forms of *dawah* including proselytization in Pakistan and globally. See Iqtidar (2011) for more on the development of the Jamaat-ud-Da'wah and its relationship with the Jamaat-e-Islami and electoral politics. See Metcalf (2003) on the practices of the Tablighi Jamaat.

<sup>22</sup> Deobandi refers to a Sunni Islamic movement that emerged out of the Darul Uloom Deoband in India in 1867 in response to the cultural impacts of colonization and has influenced movements and political parties globally (Pakistan, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, United Kingdom, South Africa, North America). Although Maududi attended Darul Uloom, his religious philosophy did not strictly adhere to Deobandi principles (Metcalf, 2009).

<sup>23</sup> See Toor (2011) for an analysis of the repercussions of this narrowly constructed Muslim identity on religious minorities.

<sup>24</sup> *Jihad* refers to the struggle to be a pious Muslim and to maintain Islam. Understandings of *jihad* vary and it can take multiple forms including armed struggle. In the case of the women I interviewed, *jihad* denoted the struggle to maintain and develop their piety in face of resistance and obstacles from their personal relationships and social environments (see chapter four). In the case of the Zia-ul-Haq dictatorship's relationship with the Jamaat-e-Islami, *jihad* was mobilized to create legitimacy for militant participation in American proxy wars. See Jalal (2008) for a discussion of the historical variations of understandings of *jihad* in South Asia.

and “provided legitimacy for political and legal measures aimed at imposing a puritanical version of Islam on Pakistani society” (Jamal, 2013, p. 4). The Jamaat and the Jamaat’s Islamic discourse thus proliferated through such entanglements with state, military, and imperialist politics.

The Jamaat-e-Islami Women’s Wing operates as a more or less separate entity from the Jamaat-e-Islami in that it has its own governance structures and decision making bodies, however it does receive a small allocation of funds from the Jamaat-e-Islami and is structured around similar principles (Jamal, 2013). The Women’s Wing also includes the Jamaat-e-Islami Women’s Commission, which was established as a research, education, and advocacy body. The Commission concentrates on conducting research studies, developing policy recommendations, and educational materials on women’s issues, drawing on their Islamic perspective on matters such as violence, employment, education, health and reproductive rights (Jamal, 2013).

While Al-Huda does not explicitly claim to be grounded in Maududi’s teachings, Dr. Farhat Hashmi, the founder and a central personality at Al-Huda, received her initial religious education from her parents, both of whom were members of the Jamaat, and from attending Jamaat-e-Islami home-based discussion groups with her mother in Sarghoda, Punjab (S. Ahmad, 2009; Jamal, 2013). Hashmi was also a member of the Jamaat’s women’s student wing, the Jamiat-e-Talibat, while she attended Punjab University (S. Ahmad, 2009). Not surprisingly, there are key resemblances in her ideas about, for instance, taking a literalist approach, critiquing mystical and devotional practices, working towards an Islamic way of life based on an idealization of the time of the Prophet Mohammed as per the Quran and *hadith*, and removing “cultural accretions” from the practice of Islam (S.

Ahmad, 2009, p. 40). Al-Huda emerged after the Jamaat had acquired prominence in electoral politics and their perspective on Islam had become a familiar, albeit contested and controversial, part of the discursive landscape in much of Pakistan. These resemblances are an important component of the historical and socio-political context that was foundational in Al-Huda's success after Farhat Hashmi and her husband established Al-Huda in 1994 with the vision of "Quran for all. In Every Hand, In Every Heart" ("Al-Huda International," n.d.).

A central component of the Jamaat and Al-Huda's activities is the practice of *dawah*. *Dawah* broadly refers to the Islamic duty to invite others and spread the message of Islam (Mahmood 2005, 57; Ahmad 2009, 1). This invitation can take many forms and different Islamic groups associate it with different activities. In the Jamaat and Al-Huda's discourse of piety, *dawah* includes spreading Islamic education in formal and informal ways, publishing and disseminating Islamic materials, and engaging in social welfare activities such as providing aid to impoverished communities. *Dawah* can include spreading the message to non-Muslims and Muslims but the *dawah* activities of the women I interviewed were primarily aimed at other Muslims. Because *dawah* takes their messages outside of the institutional spaces of these organizations, the Islamic discourse propagated by Al-Huda and the Jamaat is not always under organizational supervision and constraints. Notably, Jamaat women's *dawah* is at times entangled with electoral politics, however, *dawah* is a key vehicle through which the Jamaat's Islamic discourse is dispersed beyond the realm of electoral politics.

Many of the women I conducted research with engaged in *dawah* by attending or hosting women's *dars*<sup>25</sup> – mostly home-based study and discussion groups, where women would gather to hear about the message of the Quran and *hadith* and discuss it as it relates to their everyday lives.<sup>26</sup> The Jamaat and Al-Huda also offer more formal and structured courses<sup>27</sup> in Islamic education at their seminaries, campuses, education centres, and through home-based Quran classes. Hashmi sought to accomplish her vision of “Quran for all” by providing methodical Islamic instruction in various forms to women. This included the core activity of a diploma program, which included courses on Quranic Arabic language training, *seerah* (Prophetic Biography), *tafseer* (exegesis), Quranic and *hadith* sciences, and *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence) (“Al-Huda International,” n.d.). In addition to the diploma program, Al-Huda offers stand-alone public lectures, intensive courses, workshops, opportunities for listeners to sit in on any class, and an advanced post-diploma program for select students. Al-Huda and Jamaat students and graduates are also encouraged and trained to hold *dars* and Quran classes for their respective communities as part of their *dawah*. Many of the women I interviewed held or participated in *dars* and Quran classes, typically taking place in homes, and attended by other women from their social circles or neighbourhoods.

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<sup>25</sup> In the accounts of the women I met, *dars* refers to an Islamic lesson or lecture and discussion on a specific topic. Al-Huda and the Jamaat not only encouraged women to attend *dars*, but also encouraged them to give *dars*. Often *dars* sessions would be held regularly but sometimes a *dars* would be given at special occasions (such as weddings, funerals, or during the month of Ramzan).

<sup>26</sup> Often, the provision of Jamaat social welfare supports came with the requirement that the beneficiaries attend Jamaat *dars*, recite verses of the Quran or listen to a sermon. See Ashfaq (2006) on how Jamaat women would bring aid to women in prison but would ask that they sit through a *dars* or recite sections of the Quran before receiving aid.

<sup>27</sup> Their curriculum draws primarily on materials that these organizations publish themselves but there is some overlap in the materials they use from outside sources.

While I focus on how the Islamic discourse propagated by Al-Huda and the Jamaat influenced the processes of pious subject formation of the women I conducted research with, this is not necessarily a reflection or a comment on the organizations themselves. Throughout this dissertation, I deliberately focus on interviews with women who were not official members of the Jamaat-e-Islami party or part of the leadership of Al-Huda in order to temper the official institutional or party line and foreground the everyday experience of an Islamic praxis informed by Jamaat and Al-Huda discourse.<sup>28</sup> As mentioned, because both these organizations place a strong emphasis on *dawah*, the Islamic discourse they propagate takes on a necessarily dispersed quality. This is reflected in the diversity of levels of affiliation with the organizations amongst the women I interviewed: Some women were more formally linked to these organizations while others were involved in more peripheral ways. By foregrounding the Islamic praxis of women affiliated with Al-Huda and the Jamaat, rather than the organizations themselves, this dissertation makes space for how women take up and incorporate this Islamic discourse into their own lives, relationships, and practices of piety. This approach makes visible how these discourses are inhabited in intersectional and contradictory ways in relation to other, often proximate, Muslims who do not share their processes of pious subjectivation.

In addition to a deliberate focus on women who were not members of the political party, not all the women I met in Karachi were official members of the Jamaat-e-Islami: Many of them were part-time volunteers at the Women's Commission, teachers or students at Jamaat schools, or regular attendees of Jamaat-e-Islami *dars* in their neighbourhoods. A

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<sup>28</sup> For more on Jamaat women engaged more directly in electoral politics see Jamal (2013) and Iqtidar (2011).



number of women I met at Al-Huda had formerly been associated with the Jamaat-e-Islami, some officially as members, others as participants of Jamaat-e-Islami classes or *dars*. Also, several Jamaat women I met had participated to varying degrees in Al-Huda learning opportunities. Of the twenty-five women I interviewed, eight had overlapping trajectories between Al-Huda and the Jamaat. Several others routinely referred to print, audio, and digital publications of both groups. Many women also referred to both groups as “authentic” when recommending where I should go for my research. As such, there was much overlap between interviewees from the two groups that makes it difficult to neatly delineate their Islamic discourse as distinct or mutually exclusive. Furthermore, participation in either group in and of itself does not imply a stable, coherent, or monolithic identity or practice of Islam: Some women I interviewed at Al-Huda had more similarities in terms of their Islamic praxis with the women I interviewed at the Jamaat than with other women at Al-Huda, and vice versa.

Although there were important similarities between Al-Huda and the Jamaat, there were also differences in how and why women participated in either organization. Several women at Al-Huda who had previously participated in Jamaat-e-Islami learning opportunities said that they left the Jamaat because the pressure to get involved in party politics was overwhelming. To them, Al-Huda represented a similar approach to Islam without the added pressure to join party politics. Indeed, much of the Jamaat’s formal Islamic educational opportunities are geared towards cultivating participation in parliamentary politics. Advancement in Islamic education at the Jamaat is tied to advancement in party politics. Notably, the Jamaat-e-Islami Women’s Wing has been instrumental to a shift in parliamentary culture with an increase in women holding elected

positions. Amina Jamal (2013) suggests that this is a testament to the success of their discourse of “*pardah* in parliament” that diverged from campaigns by women’s rights organizations for women’s involvement in electoral politics as a move from “*pardah* to parliament” (p. 8). That is, Jamaat women assuaged the pitting of piety against politics by reconciling *pardah* with participation in public political spaces. Jamal (2013) goes on to state:

there is no doubt that their activism has contributed to the successful linking of Islamic modesty and freedom of mobility by the scarf-wearing women who are appearing in large numbers in public spaces as university students, clerical and retail workers, professionals, and most important, political representatives at the local and national levels. (p. 14)

However, for the Al-Huda members who had formerly participated in the Jamaat, the pressure to join party politics represented a glass ceiling of sorts in the advancement of their piety. That is, they wanted to proceed to advanced levels of the Jamaat’s formal education without having to participate in party politics. They turned to Al-Huda because of its proclaimed commitment to maintain a distance from electoral politics.

Correspondingly, as Jamal suggests, many women in the Jamaat who had participated in Al-Huda felt that the lack of a connection to party politics stunted their Islamic praxis and obstructed a key aspect of piety (Jamal, 2013). It is important to note, however, that although these connections were valuable to the Jamaat women I met, they too kept their distance from direct involvement in electoral politics for various reasons. Foremost of these reasons was that they did not think that this was a priority for them, even though they felt that it was an important aspect of Islam. By contrast to the women in Jamal’s (2013) account of the Jamaat, electoral politics did not figure as a prominent feature of the Islamic discourse espoused by the Jamaat women I met. For many of the Jamaat women I

met, regular participation in home-based classes in their neighbourhoods was the extent of their involvement in the Jamaat.

While this dissertation focuses more so on middle and upper class women, it is important to note that there were key differences in the socio-economic demographics that Al-Huda and the Jamaat targeted as organizations. Reflecting the Jamaat-e-Islami's strategic focus on the middle and lower classes in urban and rural areas, many Jamaat women belong to and work with this demographic audience in their research, education, and advocacy activities. Jamal (2013) suggests that the Jamaat has seen most success amongst middle-class women in urban centres in Pakistan, although it is gaining ground in the upper classes as well. She argues that this is because of the allure of a "modern Islamic revivalism" that appealed to "moderate" middle-class sensibilities through a balance between "overly restrictive practices of many Muslim groups and what they reject as the ultra-modern culture of the elite classes" (Jamal, 2013, p. 4). By contrast, Al-Huda initially strategically focused on urban women from elite upper and upper-middle classes and then extended to women from lower classes in urban and rural areas. The opportunities provided for members of the upper classes to participate in Al-Huda learning opportunities is what at one time set it apart from the Jamaat. However, Al-Huda did also eventually aim to include the same demographics as the Jamaat even as their commitment to not exclude the upper classes continued to be a distinctive feature of their Islamic praxis. This commitment can be seen, for example, in their presence in affluent neighbourhoods, their pedagogical approach, and their choice of lecture venues at elite hotels and country clubs. They also offered instruction in English as well as Urdu in an effort to make their classes accessible to the elite English-medium demographic in Pakistan as well as diasporic and

global audiences (S. Ahmad, 2009). The Jamaat has also taken cues from Al-Huda's success and adopted some of their pedagogical approaches to Islamic instruction as well which led to some diversification in the socio-economic locations of women getting involved with the Jamaat (Jamal, 2013).

Throughout this dissertation, invocations and conceptualizations of Islamic concepts, references to scriptural and exegetical texts, elaborations on aspects of Al-Huda and the Jamaat as organizations, are all based on what was brought up in the interviews or in participatory observations with the women I met. I refrain from using excerpts from the Quran and *hadith* directly in order to foreground how the women I interviewed understood these texts and how they are made relevant in these women's everyday lives. Moreover, as several women's rights organizations and many of the women I conducted research with pointed out, the tendency to take up excerpts from scripture without locating it within its textual, exegetical, and historical contexts leads to reductive and over simplified readings and mischaracterizations of these excerpts, as I elaborate in chapter four. As such, because theological and exegetical analysis is outside the scope of this dissertation, I avoid direct quotations from scripture and instead rely on the varied and contextual explanations of how my respondents, the Pakistani state, and women's organizations conceptualize and employ scriptures.

The ethnographic research I refer to, including interviews and participatory observations, took place over the course of eight months in 2012 in Mississauga, Karachi, and Islamabad. I met most of the women I interviewed through personal networks and used the snowball sampling method to identify additional interviewees. Most of the interviews were conducted in women's homes and some in private spaces at the Al-Huda

or Jamaat centres and offices. I began my research in Mississauga, the city in which I reside, because of the prevalence of transformations in practices of piety I observed amongst women in my community. For instance, many women in my community changed their practices of modesty and veiling from loosely covering their heads with a scarf or not covering their head at all to the *hijab* and, in many cases, the *abaya* and *niqab*. Common religious rituals and collective practices of piety such as the *Quran khaani* and *milaad*<sup>29</sup> came to be considered cultural accretions that were inherently un-Islamic (see chapter five). The prevalence of these transformations was in part the result of the influence of *dawah* activities of Al-Huda and affiliates of the Jamaat that sought to spread their message amongst the large concentration of Pakistani Sunni Muslims in Mississauga. At the time, Al-Huda's only campus outside of Pakistan was in Mississauga, which began conferring diplomas in Islamic education to women in 2001.<sup>30</sup> The women I met in Mississauga attended home-based Quran classes with graduates of Al-Huda. I attended a number of these classes in different homes to get a sense of what these women were learning and why it appealed to them.

When I began approaching women for interviews in Mississauga, I was met with mixed reactions: Some were enthusiastic to share their stories, some took time to think it over before agreeing to the interviews, and some declined in part because they did not trust the process. For many of those who agreed, a large part of their motivation was to clear the name of Islam and to prove that, even though they wore the *hijab* or *niqab* and

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<sup>29</sup> A *Quran khaani* is a collective reading of the Quran in a gathering to commemorate a special occasion or incident. *Milaad* is a gathering to celebrate the Prophet Mohammed through devotional singing, poetry, and/or discussion. See chapter five for an elaboration of what these events entail.

<sup>30</sup> Al-Huda has since opened up campuses in India, the United Arab Emirates, the United Kingdom, and the United States of America.

followed a literalist approach to Islam, they were not Muslims of the terrorist persuasion, so to speak. Though it was difficult to ascertain the motivations for all those who declined, the ones who did offer an explanation mentioned that they were not clear on how I would use the information and whether it would bring undue scrutiny in an already hostile global political environment. The legitimacy of this concern is particularly clear when taken in the context of the heightened Islamophobia and anti-immigrant discourse around recent incidents in Canada such as the *niqab* ban (Zine, 2012), the arrest of Pakistani youth under security certificates,<sup>31</sup> and accusations against Al-Huda's Farhat Hashmi for "spreading hate" (Köhler, 2006) and her related deportation case. Moreover, mainstream Canadian media reporting on Al-Huda and especially on the deportation case has taken a stubbornly hostile stance against these women and their practices of piety, characterizing them as "puppets", "fundamentalists", or "radical" (Fatah, 2009; A. R. Khan, 2007; Köhler, 2006). It was not surprising then that for many women this was the underlying concern that shaped both their reasons for participating and their reasons for not participating in this research project.

I met with women participating in Al-Huda and Jamaat piety groups in Karachi and Islamabad to expand the scope of my research to Pakistan because I also saw considerable changes in the practices of piety in my communities there. I chose these two locations in part for logistical reasons as I have established networks in these cities. In Karachi, I met with women who attended Quran classes at three different Al-Huda centres. I also met a number of women through the Jamaat's Women's Commission office in Karachi and I

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<sup>31</sup> After 9/11, security certificates were established in Canada to legally permit the detention and expulsion of non-citizens without due process in the interest of national security. See Razack (2007) for a critical analysis of the racialized impact of security certificates.

interviewed several women who attended home-based Quran classes organized by graduates or students of Al-Huda and Jamaat courses. In addition, I attended several classes at the centres, home-based Quran classes, and social gatherings at women's homes. In Islamabad, my ethnographic research primarily took place at the Al-Huda central campus where I interviewed several women on the campus and attended a number of classes with them, including some lectures delivered by Farhat Hashmi.

Like the women I met in Mississauga, many of the women I met in Karachi and Islamabad shared their concerns about Islamophobia and worried especially about misconceptions of Muslim women in the West and amongst modern 'liberal' Pakistanis. I was often met with some suspicion from women I approached for an interview in part because of what I represented as a diasporic Pakistani academic based in a Western institution. Many women raised concerns about potential "misunderstandings" where I might not understand their perspective because we did not share the same approach to Islam. In several instances, these suspicions and concerns were assuaged because they associated me with my contacts who had referred me to them. Nevertheless, paying heed to these concerns, I take up their explanations of their Islamic praxis in a careful and detailed manner by way of taking their notions of the sacred seriously, sharing their stories, and honouring the knowledge that they shared with me. At the same time, this does not preempt a critical analysis of the ways in which these women are implicated in relations of power. For instance, I include an analysis of how many of these women are engaged in a classed project of religiosity that is complicit in the marginalization of impoverished populations (see chapter five). The women I met in Pakistan were primarily from middle and upper class backgrounds and some of them lived in some of the most elite

neighbourhoods in Karachi and Islamabad. The women I met in Mississauga came from upper-middle class backgrounds in Pakistan, some of them having moved to Canada very recently, and considered themselves middle class in the context of Mississauga.

### **Note on the Spatiality of Piety**

This dissertation draws on interviews with women geographically located in Karachi, Islamabad, and Mississauga. All the women I met identify as 'Pakistani' in complex and contradictory ways (see chapters three and five), however, not all of them lived within the geographic borders of the Pakistani nation-state. Furthermore, while I make geographic identification of cities such as Karachi, Islamabad, and Mississauga, this is not meant to represent them as homogenous spaces. The differences within these cities, from neighbourhood to neighbourhood, bring into question the usefulness of the city as a spatial designation. Perhaps a more useful identifier would be their neighbourhoods – women from the Defence Housing Authority, Clifton, the F sector, Erin Mills, or Streetsville. In addition, many of the women I met in Karachi and Islamabad had lived, visited, or had family, friends, or business relations outside of Pakistan and many of the women I met in Mississauga had similar connections to Pakistan and elsewhere. The women I met in Mississauga had all migrated from Pakistan (Karachi, Lahore, and Islamabad) within the last one to fifteen years and were attached to Pakistan in multiple ways – affect, belonging, economic, familial. Even Farhat Hashmi, the founder of Al-Huda completed her doctoral degree from the University of Glasgow in Scotland and lived in Mississauga for a number of years.



While these direct transnational connections are important, the Islamic discourse espoused by the women I conducted research with is transnational in multifaceted ways. For instance, when I walked into one of the Al-Huda centers in Karachi, I was greeted with a poster of the Al-Huda campus in Mississauga on the billboard highlighting Al-Huda's international status. A woman I met at the centre who had been involved with Al-Huda from its early stages told me a story about how Hashmi included the suffix "international" in Al-Huda's official name to signal the organization's cosmopolitan outlook and her aspirations to expand the organization beyond Pakistan. This "global outlook" was one of the central reasons my respondents gave for the appeal of the organization to the upper classes. That is, it fostered a sense of a cosmopolitan Islamic discourse that effectively affirmed upper class women's self-perceptions as participants in global networks and cultures.

Moreover, for some women in both Al-Huda and the Jamaat, allegiance to the nation-state was sacrilege since their ideals of Islamic piety required identification with a transnational Muslim *ummah* (community).<sup>32</sup> These allegiances notwithstanding, their piety intersected with Pakistani nationalist discourses in complex and contradictory ways. For instance, diasporic engagements with processes of pious subject formation were constituted through conceptualizations of a spatial displacement that distanced diasporic women from the lure of Hindu/Indian cultural practices in Pakistan. This understanding of a kind of diasporic purity or authenticity draws on problematic Pakistani religio-nationalist discursive logics of Hindu/Muslim animosity that are tied to the basis of the independence

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<sup>32</sup> *Ummah*, or *ummat*, in the usage of the women I met, refers to a transnational Muslim community. See Asad (2003) and Jalal (2000) for more on conceptualizations of the *ummah*.

of Pakistan from India (see chapter five). As will become clearer in subsequent chapters, diasporic and transnational mental maps are integral to how Islamic subjectivity is articulated, validated, and produced in my respondents' discourses of piety.

### **Discursive Spaces**

In the following sections, I draw on how the women I met understood the significance of these organizations in order to foreground what these organizations meant to them. Several women characterized their learning experiences as a shift in how they understood Islam; it became more “accessible”, “practical”, “applicable” and “relatable” to them.<sup>33</sup> For many women, participation in Al-Huda and the Jamaat made them realize that the Quran was an instructive text for women that could be applied to their everyday lives. Like Donya's analysis of the changes brought about in women's relationships to Islamic texts described at the beginning of this chapter, many women reiterated the paradigm shift borne out of the idea that the Quran is applicable to contemporary everyday life and not just part of an ancient narrative. For instance, Muna, a graduate and a teacher at an Al-Huda centre in Karachi, was skeptical when she first came to Al-Huda but was “blown away” by how “Al-Huda really teaches you about how to handle the situations of today”. Muna's comments also betray how she assumed that Al-Huda's Islamic teachings would not resonate with her contemporary and personal life. Seeing the relevance of the content of

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<sup>33</sup> These notions of access and relatability to the Quran echo 19<sup>th</sup> century Islamic reform movements in South Asia that sought to establish a modern Islamic identity through an emphasis on unmediated and direct individual engagement. These movements were shaped by colonial era politics, legislative and legal developments, education reform, and the introduction of the printing press. See Jalal (2000) and Metcalf (2009) for analyses of these movements. Also see Jamal (2013) for a discussion of the connections between these movements and contemporary developments in the Jamaat-e-Islami.

Al-Huda's teachings was a new and exciting experience, reflecting a sense of appreciation for the existence of a space where she would be able to relate to Islam. Zainab, another Al-Huda graduate, volunteer, and organizer of a home-based Quran class in Karachi, described the impact of Al-Huda's technique of applying the text to everyday life:

In our class we had 500 students and if we go to this class with a problem from our homes, the *tafseer* (exegesis)<sup>34</sup> from that day would somehow address it. I would turn to my friend and say 'this is the problem I was having at home and today the *tafseer* has solved my problem'. My friend would say yes but she would also find some solution in the same *tafseer* for a different problem! If you asked each of the 500 people there, all of them would say this that my problem has been solved through today's *tafseer* even when everyone's problem was different. Now what can I say. I don't know how, but this is what happened with everyone.

Zainab conveys her amazement that so many different people were able to relate to the same message when she implies the miraculous ubiquity of relatability of the message of the lesson. The novelty of the connection between the text and everyday life for many of these women cannot be understated. For Donya, Muna, and Zainab, these connections were central to transformations in their relationships to Islam where it became an integral part of their lived experiences and processes of subject formation.

Furthermore, it was not only the connection to practical everyday life but the ways in which these groups and institutes were attentive to gendered dimensions of the everyday that made them especially appealing to many women. Many women were "amazed" that Islam is also applicable to their physical and sexual life in significant ways.

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<sup>34</sup> Al-Huda and Jamaat's focus on *tafseer* has been an effective way of generating a sense of relevance of Islam in everyday life. The practice of *tafseer*, which is a form of exegesis, would generally be taken up by women who were considered more learned. This authority to do *tafseer* was established through progressions through Al-Huda and the Jamaat's stages of learning though there was no set level of advancement especially in the context of home-based groups. Women who presented *tafseer* in study groups and classes would refer to a mix of Islamic history (sometimes including a history of the exegesis of a certain passage) and contemporary material. The contemporary material would include references to current affairs, everyday struggles women go through, social interactions in various contexts (hospitals, schools, marketplaces), and more. Their exegesis would more often than not heavily reference other exegetical sources.

Donya explained that women are able to relate to the teachings of another woman: “There are things [women] don’t want to talk to anybody about because they can’t relate to that person. What happened with this is that religion became more accessible, more relatable to women”. For Donya, learning about Islam from another woman enabled her to be more candid and to bring up matters that she would not have been able to discuss with a male teacher. Farida, another teacher at an Al-Huda centre in Karachi, elaborated on how she started to see Islam after attending a few sessions of a home-based Quran class in her neighbourhood: “Islam not only tells us about our (individual) life but also about collective life...It tells you about families, husband, and wife, everything really. So when we go out in the world, we know”. Farida’s comments bring the matter of social and ethical behaviour into conversation with what Islam says in her emphasis on collective life. Farida characterizes Islam as a way for her to learn how to conduct herself in various social relationships and situations that made her feel more prepared to participate in these relationships as a woman - to “know” how to be in the world, as she put it.

The opening up of this space is especially relevant for topics that would otherwise be considered taboo or would have some sort of shame attached to them. These tended to be matters related to women’s bodies and sexualities. For instance, a few women mentioned specifically that they were glad that they were made aware of “*paki ka ghusl*” which loosely translates to “purifying wash” referring to an Islamic method of washing your body after having sexual relations. That Islam recognized the woman’s body as a sexual body in need of care was a revelation to many women. This sentiment was echoed in how women described moments in their classes at Al-Huda and the Jamaat where they were able to openly ask questions about intimacy. Muna, for example, was amazed that she

was able to bluntly ask questions during her coursework at Al-Huda that she never thought she would be able to ask in a religious environment: “[Where] else can you ask if you can give your husband a blowjob and still be a good Muslim?” Muna explained that she was grateful for finding a place where she did not have to worry about the risk attached to asking a question that revealed something about her sexuality. Prior to these experiences at Al-Huda, Muna imagined her sexuality to be in opposition to being a “good Muslim”. Learning about Al-Huda’s Islamic exegesis on whether or not a “blowjob” is permitted and under what conditions, bridged the divide that she had perceived between her sexuality and her religiosity.

Sumaya, an organizer and participant of a home-based Quran class in Mississauga, pointed out that women who did not have relationships with other women in their family and community where they felt comfortable discussing intimate and sexual matters found themselves engaged in these conversations at Al-Huda or the Jamaat. Sumaya recounted how she felt when she first found the space to discuss such matters in one of the first Quran classes she attended during the holy month of Ramzan:<sup>35</sup>

One of the first things I remember from the class that started in Ramzan – well I was newly married and when [my husband] would leave for work in the morning I would give him a peck on the cheek even in Ramzan. That day only in her class it clicked to me to ask if this is even allowed? Does your fast break because of this? The teacher talked about how it does not break your fast [when you] give your husband a peck on the cheek and I was so excited that I exclaimed ‘really?’ And everyone was laughing. That day I realized that [this teacher] understands, that she can relate to examples that we live through.

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<sup>35</sup> Ramzan is the month of fasting in the Islamic calendar. For many of the women I met, it is a particularly auspicious time where practices of piety are elevated through ritual fasting, worship, and abstaining from entertainment and pleasure.

In Sumaya's telling of her experience in a Quran class, she conveys her appreciation of a space where she was able to talk about giving her husband a peck on the cheek, and to get a response that did not shame her. As she explained, that she was able to exclaim "really?" and be excited about continuing her everyday expression of affection for her husband in a space for learning about Islam was in itself an exciting realization about what learning about Islam can mean for her. She described this incident as the moment when she began to see the possibilities of the extent to which Islam can be made part of her life with the proper guidance from a teacher who can relate to her. Sumaya went on to explain, "I had [more] questions that had never been taken up by my family, by my mother, for the sake of modesty. And I did not ask". She highlights that these spaces allowed her to have conversations about her body and sexuality in ways that she had not had with her family. Having a teacher she can relate to, who she does not need to be "modest" around, whose purpose is to guide and not judge, and who was knowledgeable about Islam, gave Sumaya the opportunity to ask the questions about her body and sexuality that she could not with other women in her life.

It is important to note, however, that these women did not only bring up learning about Islamic ways of approaching their bodies and sexuality because they felt that there were Islamic rules and regulations that they were missing from their lives – although that was part of it. Rather, they brought up these matters as examples of feeling validated, intrigued and enticed by the idea that everyday private or personal things that are important to them are also important in Islam. These conversations contributed to the validation of their desires and sexuality as women, the removal of shame and embarrassment from their expressions of sexuality, and the recognition of their bodies as

worthy of care. Furthermore, these were marked shifts from the ways in which Islam had been mobilized by the Pakistani state to regulate women's sexuality through, for example, the Hudood Ordinances discussed in chapter three. It is in the context of a regulatory socio-political environment that stories of sexuality and women's relationships with their bodies acquire particular significance for many of the women I interviewed. That is, they were able to reconfigure relationships between women, sexuality, and Islam through the spaces provided by Al-Huda and the Jamaat.

Speaking about Al-Huda in particular, many women chose to join because it seemed like a relatively safer space that was less "harsh" and "non-judgmental" compared to some of the other piety groups they explored. This facilitated participation from women who would otherwise feel judged, defensive or stifled in a more rigid atmosphere for their lifestyles. As Sumaya put it, "Some [other] classes I found kind of harsh. They would make it sound like you are condemned for life and cannot be rectified!" Al-Huda was different. The prospect of redemption was particularly appealing for the urban, educated, upper class women who were the initial primary audience of Al-Huda's teachings.

Perceptions that their 'modern' lifestyles would be a barrier to their participation in spaces for Islamic learning were quickly dismissed for many women when they joined Al-Huda. For instance, Rabia described why, after much searching, she ended up at Al-Huda: "Initially when I went to Al-Huda, I never used to cover myself [*hijab*]. And I thought when I feel that I have to do it then I will do it". Her teacher at the time told her that she did not need to cover as an everyday practice to be part of Al-Huda, however, she would need to wear a *hijab* as part of the Al-Huda uniform. Appreciating the distinction between the *hijab* as religious practice and as uniform, Rabia complied and valued that there was no pressure

on her to wear the *hijab* as a religious practice outside the class. She mentioned that other institutes she explored did not offer the same flexibility and expressed her admiration of Al-Huda's approach: "[They] let her listen. Let her decide for herself. Why force her? That also gave me a lot of reason to think [about myself] – let people decide for themselves and don't be judgmental". Rabia's comments indicate how she was relieved to not feel judged by other women at Al-Huda, but also how this gave her pause to think and be more open and non-judgmental herself.

Shumaila concurred with Rabia's impression when she told me about how she felt when she joined Al-Huda and was not in the practice of wearing an *abaya*:

When I first went [to Al-Huda], I didn't wear the *abaya*, I was just wearing a scarf and some of my hair was showing and it still does sometimes (laughs)...[but] that kind of freedom where they tell you this is the right thing but you make the decision, you make the choice...I think that's what's important.

Similarly, Muna, mentioned that she valued that "they are not saying you must do this, you must do that" and affirm the idea that "Allah will always take you back" no matter what kind of a life you have lived before or what religious codes you have failed to live up to: "Like don't even worry about not being covered, not covering your boobs or whatever...just forget about it and just do what you can". The understanding that they would be redeemable despite their mistakes produced a sense of unconditional belonging for Shumaila and Muna, which, in turn, legitimated their aspirations to piety. Shumaila laughing about her hair still showing every now and again reflects how she perceived Al-Huda as a flexible space where she could have these imperfections in her practice of *hijab*. As reflected in Muna's comments, the perception that it would be good enough to simply "do what you can" made these learning environments more friendly, accessible, and



facilitated relationships between women that were not based on assessing each other's levels of piety.

Foundational to what women such as Sumaya, Rabia, Shumaila and Muna saw as a non-judgmental atmosphere was the recognition and acknowledgement of many women's 'modern' lifestyles that did not require them to hide or deny where they were coming from. Rather, the strategy of directly engaging with and relating to these 'modern' lifestyles facilitated the transitions many women were attempting to undertake. Referring to one of her favorite teachers, Sumaya observed that this flexibility was because her teacher was coming from similar experiences:

She was very humble in the sense that she would say that everyone makes mistakes. So probably she was more from our kind of background – those who are coming from a lifetime of doing all those [wrong] things...For example, those of us who have had a certain kind of academic upbringing with co-education, or having grown up watching movies and dancing to music, like in *dholkis*<sup>36</sup> – we are coming from this background and if someone can't relate to that then there are very few people who would continue [in the class].

Sumaya's teacher's ability to relate, regardless of whether something fell in line with Islamic ideals or not, generated a sense of implied solidarity that Sumaya describes as imperative for her and others to continue in the class. That her teacher had participated in singing and dancing at weddings demonstrated her relatability for Sumaya. This was the challenge of teaching content that directly negated how many women had grown up and how they and their communities outside of Al-Huda lived their lives. Although many women who came across such teachings would reject them and discontinue any involvement despite Al-Huda's attempts to relate to their lives, for many of the women who

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<sup>36</sup> A *dholki* is social gathering held in the weeks leading up to a wedding. It includes eating, singing, dancing, decorating, and preparing for wedding events.

stayed, this relatability was a selling feature in Al-Huda's approach to religious learning.<sup>37</sup> Thus, for some, acceptance of the repudiation of their former lifestyles was made possible through the creation of an accommodating and flexible space where many of the upper class women I met felt welcomed, safe and accepted.

### **Authorizing Pedagogies**

While these spaces were integral in cultivating intimacies and a sense of ownership of Islam as it applied to their everyday lives, they also cultivated a sense of authority for many women in their knowledge of Islam. This was constituted, in part, through the formality of their pedagogical structures and their related mobilization of claims to authenticity, rationality, and merit (also see chapter five). These spaces facilitated women's engagement in formal Islamic education, the formality of which held some weight in legitimizing their authority over religious matters. This legitimacy was especially relevant in instances where women found themselves in a role where other family members were not interested in developing their piety in the same way and they saw themselves as the corner stone of the practice of piety in their households. Often, these women were the only ones in their families attempting to make changes at multiple levels of Islamic praxis in their households. For some women, this meant that they were the ones teaching the men in their households how to be proper Muslims, which in their

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<sup>37</sup> Relatedly, in the conclusion of her book on Al-Huda, Sadaf Ahmed (2010) expresses her regret in seeing the transformation of her cultural landscape in Pakistan. She specifies Al-Huda's discouragement of events such as *mehndi*, *mayyun* (wedding celebrations), *basant* (spring festival), and colloquialisms such as *khuda hafiz* (a parting phrase that translates to "May god protect you" that Al-Huda discourages because of the ambiguity of the word "god" preferring *allah hafiz* instead).

interpretation meant that men had authority over women, and the rights and responsibilities that come with it (see chapter four). The pedagogical approach that many teachers took in Al-Huda and the Jamaat contributed to shaping how many women made these interventions in their households. For many women, gaining authority over their practices of piety was derived from confidence in their advanced knowledge of Islam and validated by pedagogical structures that appealed to the sensibilities of the urban, literate classes in Pakistan and the diaspora. In other words, what women learnt is as significant as how they learnt it. Many women legitimized their learning with references to highly structured meritocratic classes, organized lesson plans, globalized points of reference, use of technology, space for discussion and disputation, and an emphasis on literacy and religious texts. For these women, this form was a testament to the credibility, rationality, and authenticity of the content of their learning, which helps them wield some power – albeit to varying degrees – over the form and direction of piety in their households.

For several women, this pedagogical pedigree was particularly instrumental when it came to convincing the less religious family members, and especially spouses, to make changes to conform to their understanding of an Islamic lifestyle. As mentioned, transforming the spousal relationship was a critical aspect of piety for many of the women I interviewed. This was because of the emphasis on the importance of marriage in the Quran and *hadith*, in many women's understanding of Islam, as the site in which "half your faith" is practiced. That is, marriage, and the relations, activities, roles and responsibilities that come with it, were understood as a central site for their practice of piety. As such, rectifying spousal relationships, often in the face of resistant spouses, became a common struggle for many of my respondents. Beenish, a volunteer at the Jamaat Women's

Commission and a teacher at a Jamaat class for girls in Karachi, described her struggles to do just this with her husband who was not initially as inclined towards piety as she was:

I did find it difficult to be in a family and take my husband with me on this journey. That was a lot of work. Of course, your husband, you cannot force your husband to do something. When we got married, my husband didn't pray and that really hurt me. Now, *alhamdulillah*<sup>38</sup> he prays and he also has a beard. He changed a lot. Accordingly, if I say something like we shouldn't be going to this party or that I cannot attend, he now says okay you don't go and I won't go either and we can declare together that we don't go to things like *mehndi* and *mayyun*<sup>39</sup> to our families. So, there are some things that were difficult like this...to walk with your family and take them with you.

Beenish described how it was difficult for her to develop her piety in line with what she was learning at the Jamaat classes while having to come home to a family and husband who were not with her on this journey. She explained that she saw it as her duty to bring her husband along with her on this journey, which required "a lot of work" on her part. Her investment of time and labour into this work was a reflection of her belief that marriage was an integral component of her piety. Beenish's appreciation of the changes that did come about in her husband because of her work also reflect a sense of relief at no longer being alone in taking a stand against what she perceived to be un-Islamic practices in their family and community. As she developed her knowledge and practice of Islam, Beenish was able to convince her husband to make these changes alongside her.

Muna, another Al-Huda graduate described similar struggles with her husband. She mentioned that she was already facing difficulties because she was coming from an

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<sup>38</sup> *Alhamdulillah* is term used colloquially to express gratitude to Allah. It translates to "praise be to Allah".

<sup>39</sup> *Mehndi* and *mayyun* are wedding celebrations that are considered to be a form of *biddat* in Al-Huda and the Jamaat's understanding of piety (see chapter five). In the social contexts of the women I met, the *mehndi* was an occasion where women, and sometimes men as well, gather prior to the marriage ceremony (*nikkah*). This event symbolically marks the day the bride-to-be puts *mehndi* or *henna* on her hands and/or feet. The *mayyun* generally marks the first of several wedding occasions leading to the marriage ceremony. This event usually includes ceremonies of beautifying the bride. Both occasions often include singing and dancing.

American school – which meant that she was often accused of being too Westernized to have any credible knowledge of Islam. She described exchanges with her husband where she had to reiterate and establish her credentials as a conscientious and knowledgeable Muslim:

My hubby still asks me ‘you used to teach at Al-Huda?’ and I’m like ‘yeah I did! And for god’s sake, take me seriously’ and he’s like ‘that’s a big thing’ and I’m like ‘yeah I’ve been telling you that ever since we got married! I showed you my worksheets. I showed you my certificate. You know, like, get on with it’.

According to Muna, her husband, who was himself part of Jamaat-ud-Dawah, perceived Al-Huda as having a high standard of rigor – a perception that aided Muna in making claims about Islam and their practices of piety as a household. Muna’s references to “worksheets” and her “certificate” illustrate how she deferred to formal, structured, meritocratic pedagogical practices to establish her authority, knowing that this would resonate with her husband. She herself greatly valued this pedagogy and much of our conversation about her learning experience at Al-Huda was littered with references to rigor, classroom structure, tests, assignments, and grades. By identifying as an authority on Islam within the context of her household based on Al-Huda’s pedagogy, Muna was able to participate in creating a domestic space and relationships that adhered to what she had learnt about Islamic piety.

Correspondingly, Zainab’s siblings, who poked fun at her for becoming a ‘taliban’ when she joined Al-Huda and started wearing the *hijab* and *abaya*, eventually came to respect the knowledge she was gaining at Al-Huda and often came to her for advice. She explained:

With my brothers and sisters there is this much that they trust my knowledge, my information. If they need to ask something or get a *fatwa* (legal decision) ...or if they need a link, then they will call me and ask me. They know this much. Now I know that if I say to them that this *hadith* says this, they will accept what I am saying.

Zainab explains that she became a resource and a guide for Islamic knowledge for her siblings because they had developed “trust” in her knowledge. She went on to elaborate that they were impressed with the formality and the rigor of the classes she partook in at Al-Huda. The changes Zainab saw in her relationships came from the changes she went through herself. More specifically, she became more confident over her time at Al-Huda. Gaining confidence was built in to the Al-Huda curriculum as they encouraged women to not only come and learn, but also to learn to teach, to stand in front of an audience, to know how to approach a discussion in various settings, and to learn how to most effectively intervene. Zainab talked about how she gained confidence through Al-Huda:

I couldn't speak in front of people. I had become very submissive after I came to my in-laws'. I couldn't speak and I would feel anxious when I saw people. I lacked confidence and I didn't think I was capable of doing anything. All of my everything was cut off from the outside world.

Zainab characterized herself as a submissive, quiet, and hesitant student who generally lacked confidence when she first came to Al-Huda. She attributed the development of these characteristics to her troubled domestic set-up where she was “cut off” from spaces outside the home. As she went through and excelled in the rigorous coursework, she became more confident in her intellectual and social skills. Zainab related an anecdote of when she was asked to fill in for a lecturer who was unable to make it to class when she first started volunteering at Al-Huda after she graduated. At first she declined saying that she could not speak in front of people. But after much coaxing and support from her friends and colleagues she agreed to do it. Her supporters were literally at her side when she went to do her first lecture. Exhilarated at the success of the lecture and the feeling of being supported, Zainab said that she continued to do lectures and, moreover, she described this

moment as her turning point in feeling confident about the knowledge she had and the authority with which she could share it.

While the formality of the lessons is one of the reasons a number of women joined these classes, many also mentioned how the subject matter of everyday life gave some of the classes and lessons an informal touch that fostered closer relationships between students and teachers. Students were not only encouraged to bring up questions about everyday and intimate matters as discussed earlier, but they were also encouraged to question and interrogate more generally. Donya explained Farhat Hashmi's approach to teaching: "She is very strict in her opinions, say for example about covering of the face and so many other things. But she allowed us to talk and voice our opinions and this was something very novel and very unique". Shumaila, a diploma student at Al-Huda in Karachi, added that the novelty of this pedagogical approach was especially pronounced in the context of a religio-nationalist discourse where such open questioning of Islam would, in effect, pose an existential threat to the Pakistani nation-state and risk the penalties posed by the Hudood Ordinances and Blasphemy laws. She described her experience as follows:

I had a lot of questions at that time about religion that you can't really ask anyone because you're like what are they going to say, what are they going to think. There is this thing with us in Pakistan, this questioning religion thing. You can't do that. A lot of people get offended and they are like no you have to believe this. I wanted a lot of those questions answered and I felt like that could be done here [at Al-Huda].

Shumaila explained how she found a space in Al-Huda to ask questions that she had not dared to ask in other spaces for fear of being accused of questioning Islam and not being a good Muslim. She went on to explain that the idea of believing in some aspect of Islam without really understanding its significance or how it is supposed to be practiced was meaningless to her. She attributed the prevalence of what she understood to be

misappropriations of Islam – that is, normative practices that did not comply with her understanding of Islam – to this lack of a culture of questioning religion within the context of a religio-nationalist environment. Nevertheless, there were parameters within which such questioning took place even within Al-Huda and the Jamaat. As Shumaila explained, you have to “question to learn” not “question to deny”. Thus, the pedagogical culture enabled through these groups has inspired many women to approach vexed issues, such as *qawwam* for example, with the intention to gain a deeper understanding of Islam through study and discussion – rather than taking an adversarial approach.

The Jamaat and Al-Huda also mitigated adversarial engagement from students by developing strong relationships between students and teachers and by encouraging students to teach at home or at the centres as a form of *dawah*. That is, in addition to cultivating a sense of ownership of Islam as discussed earlier, women in teaching roles also made concerted efforts to cultivate a sense of ownership of processes of learning Islam by encouraging students to become teachers or to partake in lesson planning. This sense of ownership in developing spaces of learning mitigated adversarial encounters because it blurred the lines between students and teachers for some. Many women at Al-Huda maintained that Farhat Hashmi set the standard for fostering such student-teacher relationships. This was especially admirable, according to several women, given that the size of the cohorts in the diploma program at the main Al-Huda campus in Islamabad where she often taught exceeded 200 students. Donya described Farhat Hashmi’s relationships with the students in Al-Huda’s diploma programs as follows:

That one-on-one, she has managed to have that with almost all. I don’t know how but she knew the names of all of her students...I don’t think she sleeps much. I think she works all the time. I think she has been a role model for us. I think how humble she is...you know there is generally an impression we get of scholars, that thing she



has changed...Everyday one student at least would get a chance to spend an entire day with her...She [tries to be] available for her students.

Donya's comments convey her admiration for the effort that Farhat Hashmi put into cultivating personal relationships with her students. As Donya noted, this was an unusual practice given the inaccessibility of other Islamic scholars for whom connections with people and their everyday lives was not a priority in the same way. Donya appreciated that Hashmi did not engage in the kind of scholarly elitism that would alienate her students or make them feel inferior. Giving each student a glimpse of her day was Hashmi's way of humanizing herself for these students and to show them what she goes through to do what she does.

Many other students and graduates who had the opportunity to study with Farhat Hashmi reiterated Donya's description. Those who only heard her in the larger public lectures she held or through her audio, video, or digital recordings would invariably make note of how her "gentle", "polite" and "logical" manner appealed to them. Other teachers at Al-Huda would follow these pedagogical cues from Farhat Hashmi and in their own ways attempt to create similar learning environments for their students. Students and teachers involved with the Jamaat also described their learning experiences in similar terms, although there was not a central personality such as Farhat Hashmi who set the pedagogical tone. Finding a teacher who was relatable was an important aspect of the decision to join a Jamaat class for many women. In addition, many of the women I met occupied a dual role as student and teacher or transitioned from student to teacher. As Beenish explained, her learning was enhanced through her role as a teacher at a Jamaat school:

When you are teaching, you also become very involved with your practical life. Questions etcetera start coming that need to be weighed out and you have to think if we can't do it like this then what do we need to do to figure out how to get there.

Moreover, for Beenish, her role as teacher intensified her practice of Islam as she began to pay more attention to its applications. Beenish went on to explain how much she cherished developing her ability to articulate connections to everyday activities and use them in her lessons for the purpose of illustrating the applicability of Islamic texts. Taking on teaching roles and participating in *dawah* activities thus gave many women an enduring sense of ownership and authority over Islam.

### **Spaces of Belonging**

Several women I interviewed referred to how Al-Huda and the Jamaat made it easy for them to participate in religious learning because of the flexibility and accessibility of the different types of sessions they offered. Both Al-Huda and the Jamaat offered sessions requiring different levels of commitment as well as accessible materials in Urdu and English, which created learning opportunities for many urban, middle and upper class women. Also, different women were involved in Al-Huda and the Jamaat in different capacities. Some were formally enrolled as students or teachers; some were involved as administrative or field workers; some ran or attended home-based classes; some attended a lecture here and there; some listened to audio lectures at home. Many were involved at multiple levels simultaneously and/or shifted from one role to another in accordance with transitions in their personal lives. Though there was some pressure to get involved in the organizations' various activities, both the Jamaat and Al-Huda made it easy for women to vary their level of involvement based on fluctuations in their personal lives without fear of

any consequences. For nearly all the women I interviewed, these women-friendly spaces for religious learning made for a novel experience and marked a shift in the relationship between Pakistani women and Islam and also allowed them to foster relationships with other women.

For many women, their involvement in Al-Huda or the Jamaat precipitated through the *daura-e-Quran* (journey through the Quran), a series of special daily sessions during the holy month of Ramzan. For these women, as with many Muslims, Ramzan marks an exceptionally holy time in the Islamic calendar. The purpose of these daily sessions was to discuss the contents and application of one chapter of the Quran everyday as part of the pious practices that many were engaged in during Ramzan such as fasting and abstaining from pleasure. The pre-defined commitment of one month, the existing sense of enhanced piety during Ramzan, and the comprehensiveness of the content of these sessions made it an easy choice for women to participate as a limited engagement. For many women, this would be the first time they experienced a collective engagement with the Quran as a text that can be applied to their everyday lives. This compressed yet comprehensive experience with other women during the holy month of Ramzan gave many women a taste for the possibilities of how they can engage with Islam in more robust ways as women. Thus, attending the *daura-e-Quran* left many of the participants wanting to continue meeting and learning.

Describing the lack of access to such spaces of learning in the 1980s and 1990s when she was “searching”, Donya said, “We were not so fortunate. We didn’t have classes for women all around like now”. Beenish, attributed this proliferation of religious learning

for women to the Jamaat's model of bringing religious learning to the space of the home and to residential neighbourhoods. She explained:

Bringing women towards Quran...Jamaat-e-Islami has taken many steps in this...to go from house to house and spread Islam. From one house to another you see study circles made by Jamaat-e-Islami. This made it easy for women to come towards Quran...The home-based study circles and the thing that everyone has access to them and women gathering from different houses and coming to study the Quran...the Jamaat-e-Islami played a big role in this. Before, this did not exist at all. People talk about their ancestors but I'm just talking about my own mother who tells me that it wasn't even something people imagined doing in her time – to study and understand the Quran.

Beenish's comments refer to how the the Jamaat made a deliberate effort to start reaching out to women, especially in middle class neighbourhoods, that then influenced many other institutions, such as Al-Huda, to provide spaces for learning that would be especially catered to women. The study circles at home have provided an easily accessible and casual environment for women to enter into a more conscientious, formal and collective relationship with Islam. For many women, the idea of going to someone's home, rather than a public institution, was a more palatable entry point because of the familiarity, comfort and safety associated with going to a known neighbour's home. Because it blurred the lines between public and private space in this way, the model of the home-based Quran classes became a popular choice for many women who wanted to learn more about Islam, or even to just get out of their homes for a short time. Beenish characterized this as a game-changing strategy that yielded a major shift in how women developed their relationship to Islam.

Beenish further described how she herself only got involved with the Jamaat and started learning the Quran because of the convenience of proximity offered by a study circle that was being held in her neighbourhood. She found a class near her home and

would drop in whenever she could to study and discuss passages of the Quran with other women in her neighbourhood. These home-based study circles gave way to what some refer to as the “institute model” where the religious learning offered by organizations like Al-Huda and the Jamaat operates like a “franchise” (Donya) where learning materials and teacher/*dawah* training is centralized. This centralization has in turn increased the credibility of home-based study circles. Graduates of more formal Al-Huda and Jamaat programs would, for example, start home-based study groups as a practice of *dawah*. Many women described their trust in the “authenticity” of the materials being taught at these sessions because of the teacher’s affiliations with a credible Islamic institute.

However, for Al-Huda, this pedagogical reputation was also carefully crafted through what Donya called “red-tapeism”, where the style and content of teaching under the banner of Al-Huda at home or at the centres required women to go through a series of approval processes and certifications. As Donya went on to explain, these restrictions came about as a result of many groups popping up under the name of Al-Huda that had no official link with the institute. This may in part be because of the emphasis on *dawah* at Al-Huda and the accompanying proliferation of home-based classes and study groups. However, as Donya further explained, this “red-tapeism” caused many “good people” to leave Al-Huda because they felt constricted and start their own institutes or home-based classes for Islamic learning.

Nevertheless, as these institutes became larger and more organized, they were able to offer a greater variety of religious learning opportunities in addition to the home-based study groups. This included formal diploma courses that required a two to three-year commitment, one-week intensive programs, three-day modules, public lectures, special

sessions for the month of Ramzan, and readily available audio and digital lectures and materials. Women had several options to choose from to enhance their religious knowledge and, in some ways, this made it difficult to decline. As Beenish put it, “now if she is not learning, then its because she has chosen not to”. This variety also provided several options that allowed women to vary their levels of involvement, which ensured many women’s continued engagement. Zainab, for example, described how she adapted her religious learning to changing personal circumstances: “I was in a joint family system for a while and the engagement was quite a bit so I didn’t even have half an hour to study...so I started listening to the cassettes”. Zainab had to negotiate time for her religious learning in the context of a heavy domestic workload and the emotional labour of living with her husband’s family with whom she had unfriendly and sometimes hostile relationships. The Al-Huda cassettes became a source of some private time where she could not only learn to strengthen her piety, but, as she explained, it also made her feel like she was part of something outside of the home. The everyday applicability of the content of the cassettes also made them a relevant and useful part of her life, guiding her on how to get through her days during a particularly difficult time in her life.

Many women also observed a more general change amongst women through the proliferation of religious media, which gave women (domestic space) unprecedented access to religious knowledge. Beenish, mentioned that changes in media content have had a significant impact on women in Pakistan. Whereas Beenish used to consider the media to be the root of many problems especially in relation to women’s exposure to ideas of fashion and sexuality from all over the world, now, she values the media’s role in increasing women’s access to and understanding of Islam because of the plethora of religious

television shows featuring women religious scholars like Farhat Hashmi. As Beenish put it, “now there is a boldness and confidence. Where there was harm before there is a benefit now. She is now introduced to Islamic education. Everything is exposed and she sees it”. In addition, Donya saw the role of women religious figures in particular as beneficial to society more broadly, as Donya mentions:

They are somehow better agents of peace building. They have less extremist tendencies, which is beautiful...The role of religious women has been very good. They talk about the cooler things, they are naturally inclined to talk about ethics and *akhlaaq* and family life and social welfare and things nobody disagrees with - even the United States doesn't disagree with!

Donya indicates that the increase in women religious leaders has created a more palatable and accessible version of Islam because of the content of their teachings. She juxtaposes the “extremist tendencies” of presumably male religious leaders with the “cooler things” of female leaders to explain their popularity amongst women. Donya brings up the US to validate these women scholars as less extremist, and to explain their appeal to the upper classes, drawing on global discourses of terrorism – and inadvertently pointing to the complicity of the upper classes with these discourses. The presence of women religious figures in the media, as Donya and Beenish explain, adds a sense of breadth, longevity and accessibility to the practice of women-led religious subject formation, which have led to key shifts in the gendered conceptualization and practice of Islam especially for women in the upper classes and in the diaspora.

In addition to bringing modes of learning to domestic spaces in innovative ways, many women pointed out how easy it was to find an Al-Huda or Jamaat class that suited one's daily schedule in urban centres like Karachi and Islamabad. Whether at homes or at the centres, classes were available in the morning, afternoon and evenings. This made it

easy for women with a diversity of personal and professional commitments to get involved. For instance, Rabia, a graduate of Al-Huda's advanced diploma program and a teacher at an Al-Huda centre in Karachi, was also a science teacher at a prestigious English-medium secondary school in Karachi. She described how these flexible timings helped her negotiate and balance her commitments at home and at work to complete the Al-Huda diploma courses: "I did the first course in the afternoons. I did not leave my job also. My daughter was only 5 or 6 years of age and I used to take her with me". Rabia's comments illustrate how she valued the availability of afternoon classes that allowed her to balance childcare, work, and Al-Huda courses, which made her commitment to complete the diploma program possible.

Many other women also conveyed their relief at the idea of being able to bring their children to class when they needed to and not having to worry about childcare. In fact, some sessions at the Al-Huda and Jamaat centres for women would have corresponding sessions for children to alleviate the stress of childcare. Generally, many classes at women's homes and at the centres accommodated women who would bring their children. At one of the classes I attended at an Al-Huda centre in Karachi, the teacher, Mehvish, had her toddler sitting in her lap as she delivered her lecture. Several students in the class pointed out to me that Mehvish was particularly exemplary for them because she would deliver seamless, well thought-out lectures whilst attending to her child's needs. Indeed, as I listened to her lecture, she did not skip a beat even when her child tugged at her hijab, cried, sang a song, or ran around her desk. For many women I spoke with at the class, Mehvish represented the possibility of fulfilling several Islamic duties as a woman – she attended to her child, was continuously developing her knowledge and practice of Islam,



and did her *dawah* through delivering exceptional lectures as a teacher. Similarly, when I would visit the Jamaat office in Karachi, there would invariably be a couple of children playing on the computers while their mothers were working on various projects such as compiling materials for a publication or handling accounting matters. The Jamaat office also had snacks and juice available for the children, indicating that this was a regular practice that they accommodated.

These spaces were conscientiously cultivated to welcome women with children not only as a matter of accommodation but also to correspond with and facilitate the practice of Islamic gendered roles and responsibilities (see chapter four). That is, these accommodating spaces allowed women to fulfill their reproductive duties, as per their understandings of a household structure where men have *qawwam* (authority) over women, while engaging in activities and spaces outside the home. By bringing their children to the class, these women's husband's would have little grounds for objecting to their wives leaving the home to partake in religious education.

### **“This study group is my lifeline”**

The facilitation of women's knowledge and ownership of Islam through Al-Huda and Jamaat spaces developed alongside a sense of belonging to a community outside of the home and family for many women. In addition to these new opportunities for the development of their Islamic knowledge and piety, most women I interviewed were appreciative of the social supports that participation in Al-Huda and the Jamaat had created for them and they greatly valued the community of women they had found through this because it gave them a source of power and support outside of the household. Al-Huda and

the Jamaat thus also figure in many women's lives as spaces to build friendships and communities alongside developing their piety.

To provide a sense of the types of supports and friendships women found through their participation in Al-Huda and the Jamaat, I recount the stories of three women, Ghazala, Fatima, and Zainab, who described how these spaces were a critical part of what got them through a difficult time in their lives. Ghazala, a regular participant at a Jamaat home-based *dars* and Quran class, described a particularly troubled time in the early years of her marriage when she was ostracized by her husband's family. When she and her husband decided to get married, her husband's parents and extended family were set against it. They refused to meet her and they boycotted the wedding. As Ghazala explained, "They still don't see me. They don't allow me to visit their place. My children are going, my husband is going everyday but only I'm not acceptable". While she was pregnant with her second child, Ghazala became so frustrated and angered with her husband's inability to stand up to his parents that she decided that she couldn't live with him and told him to leave: "I wanted a divorce". In the context of these rising tensions in her household, Ghazala came across a Jamaat Quran class held at her sister's house. Her sister had previously encouraged her to attend but Ghazala explained that she had preconceived ideas that these classes were of no use to her because she could read and understand the Quran on her own if she wanted to. She happened upon the class when she was visiting her sister one day and they were discussing sections of the Quran that addressed divorce. In this session, some women in attendance spoke openly about the troubles they were having in their relationships and many of their stories resonated with Ghazala and she felt relieved that she was not alone in facing these questions. She

described how she became a regular attendee and one of the most vocal people in the sessions, asking questions, pushing the teachers and students to elaborate and explain different parts of the Quran and how it related to their experiences.

Ghazala further described how these sessions brought about some clarity for her in terms of why a household structured in compliance with the Quran and *hadith* would be more functional. She eventually decided to stay married to her husband but, with the support of the women she was studying with, she began a deliberate process of making changes to her marriage through what she was learning at the Jamaat Quran class about marriage in Islam. These changes were not only to how she was present in her marriage, but also to the division of labour and roles and responsibilities in her home. The smoother functioning of her home, as she explained, gave her a sense of accomplishment and progress that she understood to be a critical part of her piety. Even though she continued to be rejected by her husband's family, she was able to find some validation from her peers for sustaining her marriage as an Islamic imperative.

Fatima, an avid listener at an Al-Huda centre in Karachi, described the community of women she found at Al-Huda as an invaluable resource for getting through health and financial issues. When Fatima first got married, she moved to Dubai with her husband. Early on in their marriage he got a mysterious illness that went undiagnosed for two years. She described the agony with which she watched her husband's health deteriorate at an alarming rate. Fatima characterized herself as having been an "out" type of girl – that is, someone who wore sleeveless clothes, hung out with boys, always had her eyebrows done, and her hair down. When this perplexing illness came into her life, she turned to religion and found herself becoming more "modest" and praying to Allah to forgive her for her

previous lifestyle. Her friend noted her turn to religion and suggested that she start going to Al-Huda in Dubai. Fatima explained that she began attending casually as a listener, attending classes whenever she could without being formally enrolled. She learnt the virtue and practice of patience at Al-Huda, which, she says, helped her deal with her husband's illness in transformative ways. As his health deteriorated further, her husband lost his job and Fatima was forced to move back to Karachi with her children to live with her parents because they could not afford to live together in Dubai. Fatima sought out an Al-Huda centre in Karachi and started attending classes regularly as a listener again. Fatima said that this was an important part of her life in order to maintain some semblance of balance and normality in face of what seemed like unrelenting upheavals. She described the benefits of being part of Al-Huda not only in terms of the knowledge she gained about the Quran, but also in terms of the people she met there. Ranging from awe and admiration for some to empathy and camaraderie with others, Fatima found an array of relationships with other women at Al-Huda that she began to value immensely.

Zainab also shared a painful time in her life that led to her joining Al-Huda. As mentioned earlier, Zainab lived in a joint family household with her husband and his family. Zainab and her husband had decided to adopt a child because they were experiencing difficulties conceiving a child. They met a woman who was pregnant and wanted to give them her child when the child was born. "This person told me that because I don't have children and I love children so much, she would give me her child" (Zainab). Zainab described how she and her husband spent nine months preparing themselves and their home to receive this adopted child. Then, as Zainab explained:

When the child was delivered, the mother had a change of heart. She couldn't give me the child...I was so disturbed. It felt like every inch of my body was in pain...I

didn't complain to anyone. I stayed in my normal routine but everyone could see on my face that I was in severe pain but I didn't say it. My hair turned white.

Zainab confessed that although she tried her best to understand and move on, she found herself blaming Allah: "It slipped out of my mouth and I said 'Allah, why are you so cruel?'" and "a *baddua* (curse) came out of my heart for her (for the woman who would not give her the child) ...I had prayed to Allah that she suffer because of the child that she refused to give me." One of Zainab's friends recognized that she was in need of support and suggested to her that she join the Al-Huda diploma program primarily as a way to keep herself busy and to get some time to herself. Zainab was intrigued by the idea of getting out of the house as she had already been contemplating going to stay with her mother to get a break from her in-laws: "I was in a lot of pain and I wanted to go to my mother's house but I knew that if I went to my mother's house I would be..." she trailed off, insinuating that she would be put in an even more difficult position with her in-laws if she took this course of action because of the implied allegiance to her mother over her in-laws.

Zainab felt that her marital home would not be the place where she would be able to come to terms with losing the child. She explained that she was always under pressure and that her "mother-in-law had a lot of power in the household". Zainab "just wanted to go away from this place" but she had few other friends to turn to for help. She had had some experience with home-based Al-Huda Quran classes and listening to the Al-Huda cassettes, as mentioned earlier. So she started looking into it further as an option for a place to get away. Zainab thought that her in-laws would accept her going away to study the Quran with less hostility than if she were to go away to her mother's house.

Although joining these spaces was not easy for many women (see chapter four), several women I interviewed echoed the relief Zainab felt at the prospect of being outside

the home in a way that was seen as legitimate because it was for religious learning. However, Zainab explained that getting permission to join Al-Huda was not without its challenges. For instance, she wanted to go and stay at the Al-Huda campus hostel and study there to get away from the distressing situation at home, however, she explained that her mother-in-law would not allow it:

I told [my mother-in-law] that I wanted to go to the hostel and study Quran. She knew that I wanted to get some peace. So she suggested a compromise. She said 'what is the need to go to the hostel? Go in the morning and come home in the evening and do the morning's work the night before'. I said okay. Allah was trying me.

Zainab's comments reveal how she understood this moment as a test<sup>40</sup> from Allah because she knew how difficult it would be to complete the courses while living with her mother-in-law and fulfilling her household duties. Nevertheless, taking the limited permission she was able to attain from her mother-in-law, Zainab went to Al-Huda to enroll for the diploma courses.

Initially, for Zainab, joining Al-Huda was primarily a route to escaping the overwhelming problems she was having with her in-laws at home that were exacerbated by the painful experience of a thwarted adoption plan. Getting away for a bit and interacting with people who had nothing to do with the tensions at home was an appealing possibility for her. Zainab juxtaposed her experiences with her mother-in-law with her first interaction at Al-Huda:

When I went there for an interview, a girl was standing there and she asked me if I was there for an interview and she smiled at me and told me to go inside. I gave the interview and the test and did all this. It took nearly four hours. Later I saw her again and she was smiling again. I just thought to myself 'what is this?' I thought her duty would be finished by now because she's been smiling since eight in the morning and it's now four! How can she still be smiling? It didn't click. What power

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<sup>40</sup> Other women described such struggles through the concept of *jihad*. See chapter four.

is inside her that she can still smile and greet everyone? I just felt so baffled that she was still smiling and it wasn't a drawing room smile. It wasn't artificial. It was genuine.

For Zainab, this woman represented the kind of strength and peace one can potentially achieve through Islam. Zainab's comments imply how she perceived this woman's smile as a reflection of an elevated piety that materialized in her genuine smile.<sup>41</sup> Underlying her sense of admiration for this woman's enduring, sincere smile were Zainab's frustrations with her tensions at home, where smiling sincerely for this long was unfathomable. Joining Al-Huda represented the possibility of bringing some of this power and peace into her life.

She further described how such encounters with other women and the lessons she was learning at Al-Huda led Zainab to pray to Allah to take back her *baddua* and for the well being of the woman and the child who had been the source of her pain. Zainab explained that she eventually found a way to forgive this woman and made an effort to cultivate a closer relationship with her. The woman even started attending some Al-Huda sessions with Zainab. Al-Huda became a vehicle through which Zainab was able to resolve this tension in her life through forgiveness, but she also saw a more general transformation in herself through Al-Huda. She described this transformation as follows:

When I would come from Al-Huda, even if it took me an hour to get home, I would still be fresh and not tired. So to me it seemed like I was very thirsty and someone has given me something really good to drink and I was always fresh. I wouldn't feel bad at all. No matter what anyone said or how busy I was, I never felt it. I felt like I was bigger.

Zainab's feelings of nourishment and strength, as suggested in her comments, helped her go about her daily life with a different approach. She handled the tensions at home with her in-laws in more productive ways and said that she felt more confident in the ways she

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<sup>41</sup> See Shumaila's discussion of smiling as *sunnah* in chapter four.

was present in those relationships. After she graduated, she continued to stay involved in Al-Huda as a volunteer administrator and teacher. Even when her involvement became more limited due to other personal circumstances, she mentioned that she set up a weekly home-based study group to ensure she had continued access to these supports. As Zainab put it, “this study group is my lifeline.”

Ghazala, Fatima, and Zainab’s experiences are illustrative of the complexity of the intersection of Islam and gender as it is formed through women’s groups. Each of these women was struggling with issues that emerged out of heteronormative and patriarchal relationships. For Ghazala this was the persisting tension between her, her husband, and her in-laws; for Fatima, it was the precarity of her reliance on her ailing husband; and for Zainab, it was a complex confluence of failing to fulfill reproductive expectations and navigating the toxic and overwhelming patriarchal power relations in her household. What they learnt about Islam helped mitigate some of the everyday stresses they were faced with. In Ghazala’s case, for example, learning about Islamic ideals of marriage was a validating experience that gave meaning to her struggles with her husband by investing them within the development of piety. This not only meant that she was able to locate these struggles in relation to what would ultimately benefit her in the *akhira*, but also that she was able to reconfigure her marriage with the guidance of the Quran and *hadith*. Recasting her marital problems as part of a project for the improvement and development of her piety produced a different affective as well as practical approach to these struggles for Ghazala. For Fatima and Zainab, Al-Huda provided a sense of balance, peace, and strength that were critical to them getting through some difficult turning points in their lives. The precarity and tensions produced through their dependence on patriarchal



relationships were mitigated by the spaces of learning and belonging they found with other women at Al-Huda. For some, these spaces of Islamic learning presented an opportunity to be outside domestic spaces and relationships for reasons that were seen as legitimate by their families. Even though their degrees of involvement differed, the connections to these spaces and communities outside their homes produced moments of respite and changes in affective dispositions for both – as is evident in their sentiments of patience, peace, and forgiveness.

## **Conclusion**

Like Ghazala, Fatima, and Zainab, many other women described stories of difficult times and personal transformations as what brought them to the Jamaat and Al-Huda. However, it was the way that they were treated by other women that made them stay. As Muna put it, “It’s the people there who make you want to stay...a group of women who have respected me to the height of respectfulness”. The relationships constituting these spaces of Islamic subject formation were novel and crucial elements in the experiences of many of the women I conducted research with. As mentioned earlier, as organizations, Al-Huda and the Jamaat made deliberate efforts to create accessible and flexible spaces for women. They also made deliberate efforts to foster amenable interactions between women in order to make these women feel respected and welcomed. Notably, these spaces produced their own classed hierarchies and exclusions, which are discussed further in chapter five. It is thus important to keep in mind that it was these particular women from urban, middle and upper class backgrounds who developed a sense of belonging in these spaces. In addition, as chapter four elaborates, there were many women for who had to contend with

Islamophobic discourses about these organizations and the women associated with them in order to join these spaces.

The process of reclaiming religion and piety for women has, as would be expected, set in motion an array of changes in the way women themselves practice and understand Islam and in the structure of gendered relationships that are considered to be in line with their notions of piety. These changes have been cause for alarm for women's rights organizations and for the 'liberal' upper classes (see chapter three and four). This is in part because, as organizations, Al-Huda and the Jamaat carry reputations of conservatism and orthodoxy that are connected to how they are perceived as anti-woman. However, as this chapter demonstrates, the spaces these organizations have generated for women are given meaning and acquire significance within the context of women's everyday lives and experiences.

## **Chapter 2: Secular Epistemologies and Knowledge Production About Islam and Muslim Women**

Participation in Al-Huda and Jamaat spaces has precipitated a deeper commitment and engagement with processes of pious subject formation for many women. In this chapter, I elaborate on theoretical concerns in taking religious praxis and notions of the sacred seriously within dominant epistemologies and knowledge production about Islam and Muslim women. These epistemologies have two pitfalls: One, the “discursive colonization” (Mohanty, 2003, p. 63) of understandings of Muslim women’s relationships to Islam; and two, the limitation of analyses of Muslim women to the categories of ‘Islam’ and ‘feminism’. First, in terms of the former, I suggest that understandings of Muslim women’s piety are often limited by the ways in which the categories of ‘Islam’ and ‘feminism’ are entangled in the normative secularity of knowledge production and in the re-entrenched universalism of Western ethnocentric feminism. In terms of the latter, I elaborate on how this dissertation methodologically seeks to move beyond the analytical parameters of ‘Islam’ and ‘feminism’ to look at piety in intersectional and relational ways while taking the sacred seriously. This mitigates the compartmentalizing and monopolizing impetus of categories of analysis such as ‘Islam’ and ‘feminism’ in analyses of Muslim women. In other words, I want to address how Muslim women’s piety is not only limited by these categories, but also how it is limited to these categories. A central aspect of the way this project addresses these limitations is by looking at the interconnections between spiritual epistemologies and processes of subject formation – asking what subject is presumed and produced through a particular articulation of Islamic piety and how this constructs the pious subject through its others.

## **Taqwa: Always, Everyday, Everything, Everywhere**

Before elaborating on these overarching theoretical and methodological concerns, I want to provide a sense of how the women associated with Al-Huda and the Jamaat articulated Islamic piety and their notions of the sacred. To become a pious Muslim woman, members of Al-Huda and the Jamaat aim to develop their piety such that it permeates their *akhlaaq* (ethical/moral conduct) and *ibadaat* (practices of ritual worship).<sup>42</sup> Notably, for some, there was no distinction between conduct and worship as conveyed in a common refrain in the interviews I conducted: “everything you do is *ibadat*”. Accordingly, piety is developed through a comprehensive and intersecting training of their ritual practices of worship, embodied behaviours and conduct, affective dispositions, emotional responsiveness, everyday habits and relationships, among other things, in order to elevate their fear and consciousness of the presence of Allah.

Many of the women I interviewed described piety as “Allah-consciousness” and the “fear of Allah” – a dual meaning captured in the Islamic term *taqwa*. While in many ways *taqwa* is an ideal state of being, members of these piety groups emphasize that according to scripture there is no such thing as a perfect Muslim. As Muna, a teacher at Al-Huda, described it, a good Muslim is “looking for *hidayat*,<sup>43</sup> guidance, continuously to strengthen *taqwa*”. Thus, the impossibility of its attainment renders piety a lifelong and ongoing process of subject formation. As a process of subject formation, *taqwa* operates on

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<sup>42</sup> *Ibadaat* (*ibadat for singular*) commonly refers to forms of worship in Islam. This can include performing *salat/namaaz* five times a day, fasting in accordance with the Islamic calendar, reciting verses from the Quran, praying, performing the pilgrimage to Mecca. However, in the way women I met understood it, it also included personal and social conduct.

<sup>43</sup> In the usage of the women I conducted research with, *hidayat* referred to guidance from Allah. This could come in many forms including through deeper engagements with scripture and exegesis.

multiple registers (bodily, visceral, affective, emotional, social, personal) that are interconnected and co-constitutive. To these ends, these women employ various pedagogical tools that are disseminated through Al-Huda and Jamaat classroom lessons, audio/digital materials, and *dars* sessions.

My respondents' references to how their relationship with Islam changed illustrates how *taqwa* manifested in their lives. For many of these women, this conception of piety translated to a major shift in the relationship between Islam and their everyday lives. For example, Zainab, a graduate of Al-Huda, described how her relationship to Islam developed from the "Quran on the shelf in an ornate cover" to "Allah as a lively, throbbing presence" in her life, "always awake" and with her "24 hours a day". Another student of Al-Huda, Shumaila, suggested that to have *taqwa* is to "remember all the time that Allah is watching you so that no matter where you are – you don't have to be in a religious gathering or anything – you will want to do the right thing". *Taqwa* is thus conceptualized in ubiquitous terms as permeating all aspects of life. Both Zainab and Shumaila's comments were also referring to the inadequacy of conventional ceremonial confinements of Islam to particular spaces, times, places and occasions. This is a frustration that many expressed in relation to how Islam was taught to them growing up in Pakistan (see chapter five).

Efforts to acquire *taqwa* profoundly impact and structure these women's everyday lives in a way that it had not before they joined Al-Huda or Jamaat spaces, as they struggle to submit to Allah in every little thing they do from praying to drinking water to making their bed to how they conduct themselves in social gatherings. As Fariha, a student of a home-based Al-Huda class explained:

You see in Pakistan we pray *namaaz*<sup>44</sup> and things like that, but in other situations we never thought that *deen* (religion or faith) was relevant. When you are violating someone's rights, we didn't think it was something un-Islamic. Like when people park their cars and block in someone else's car they don't see it – our *deen* does not say that these things are okay. Islam teaches us *akhlaaq* and often Muslims don't think of *akhlaaq* as part of Islam. They go and pray at the mosque and then come out and feel that they left their *deen* there and now its time for *dunia* (material world). This thing is very common.

For Fariha, the flawed separation of *deen* and *dunia* relegates Islam to particular times and places and contradicts her understanding of the everyday applicability of Islam that range from matters of violating someone's rights to parking lot courtesies. As Zainab proclaimed, "This is Islam. Islam is not just having beards, doing *hajj*,<sup>45</sup> wearing a long *kurta*.<sup>46</sup> Social matters, interpersonal relationships – these are where Islam is." Zainab refers to ritual practices and outward markers of piety to highlight what she thought was the more substantial part of Islam – social matters and interpersonal relationships. Her comments imply that preoccupations with these rituals and outward markers of piety have become a stand-in for a more comprehensive engagement with Islam and the development of a substantial form of piety.

To what extent do such re-articulations of 'where Islam is' challenge the discursive foreclosure of the space allotted to 'Islam' through secular understandings of 'religion'? As is clear in the women's expression of piety above, *taqwa* is constituted through 'everyday', 'everywhere', 'everything', 'always.' These articulations of piety are indicative of how piety

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<sup>44</sup> *Namaaz* refers to what many Muslims believe to be obligatory prayers that have to be performed five times daily. All the women I met performed *namaaz* regularly and, in their understanding of Islam, it was a compulsory part of practicing their piety.

<sup>45</sup> *Hajj* is the pilgrimage to Mecca that many Muslims, including the women I met, believe to be compulsory, if one can afford it, and should be completed at least once in a lifetime.

<sup>46</sup> *Kurta* translates to shirt. In Zainab's case, she is referring specifically to men's shirts that are part of the *shalwar kameez* outfit. Wearing a particularly long *kurta* along with pants that are above the ankle are considered to be outward markers of piety for men.

bleeds out of the pre-given bounds of 'religion' and mobilizes processes of subject formation that implicate these women within an array of spaces, social relationships and structures. What are the implications of this ubiquitous notion of piety on secular renderings of women's relationships to religion?

### **Secular 'Religion'**

To understand the forms of piety that the women I conducted research with were engaged in, it is imperative to first dislodge the normativity of analytical framings that take for granted a liberal secular definition of religion. This definition of religion is ensnared in dichotomized understandings of tradition/modernity, public/private, mind/body, submission/agency, and oppression/resistance that are foundational in constructions of the ideal autonomous subject of liberalism.<sup>47</sup> In terms of knowledge production, the dominance of liberal discursive structures is problematic because these dichotomies produce categories of analysis that implicitly or explicitly centralize and valorize the trajectory of the secular liberal subject as universal teleology. Under the liberal secular formulation of the category of 'religion', Islam remains a discursively colonized category of analysis that forecloses an understanding of how the women I met engage with Islam.

To elaborate on this problematic, I turn to critical scholarship on Islam that have contributed to a deeper understanding of liberal secular epistemology of religion and the binaries that structure it. The category of religion posits a hegemonic and universal notion

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<sup>47</sup> Explorations of these dichotomies in constructions of the liberal subject draw important links to the racial and gender politics of colonial and imperial discourse. See for example, Abu-Lughod (1998), Alexander & Mohanty (2013), Asad (2003), Chakrabarty (2007), Chatterjee (1993), McClintock (1995), Mignolo (2000), Said (1978), Spivak (1999).

of the sacred that is embedded in the history of liberal secularism in the West. As Talal Asad (1993) argues, there can be no universal definition of religion “not only because its constituent elements and relationships are historically specific, but because that definition is itself the historical product of discursive processes” (p. 29). For instance, the genealogy of the normative definition of ‘religion’ is embedded within Western liberal secularism and its corresponding European Judeo-Christian social and political history. Asad (1993) points out a few problematic features of the normative definition of religion that signal its genealogy in Western liberal secularism. Foremost of these features is the relegation of religion to a “distinctive space of human practice and belief” that is autonomous from science, politics, and common sense (Asad, 1993, p. 27).

Asad’s (1993) critique of the universal definition of religion put forward by the prominent work of the anthropologist, Clifford Geertz,<sup>48</sup> is instructive for unpacking the genealogy of the “autonomous essence” attributed to religion (p. 28). Geertz’s definition is founded on the premise that religion is a system of symbols (Asad, 1993, p. 53). In Asad’s reading of Geertz, this system of symbols, as a generic feature of religion, is distinct from social, political and economic life. That is, for Geertz religion is in some ways a theory or an abstraction that is a vehicle of meaning for empirical life but is not produced through empirical life per se (Asad, 1993, p. 36). Furthermore, in this conceptualization of ‘religion’, for something to be identified as ‘religious’, it needs to draw on articulated systems of symbols. Asad (1993) maintains that this assertion itself has a specifically Christian history

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<sup>48</sup> ‘Religion’ is “1) a system of symbols which act to 2) establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by 3) formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and 4) clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that 5) the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic” (Geertz cited in Asad, 29-30).



that can be seen in, for instance, the historical development of the needs of the medieval Church to consolidate authority in one place through the construction of an authorizing discourse that was used to distinguish truth from falsehood and the sacred from the profane. To establish the authority of “one true church” (Asad, 1993, p. 39), religious practices that contradicted or did not support the system of symbols of the one true church were dispossessed of their status as “religious”. As such, defining religion as a system of symbols is entangled in regulative processes of establishing power and authority through the identification and separation of the religious from the non-religious. However, as Sherine Hafez puts it, Geertz’s definition of religion as primarily a hermeneutic tradition “masks the actual power relations that created the category of religion” and “takes for granted the separation of meaning from power” (Hafez, 2011, p. 40).

The relegation of religion to autonomous space is also tied to the emergence of the authoritative discourse of liberal secularism as a political doctrine and the attending centrality of individual rationality and autonomy. This doctrine defines and locates religion in peculiar ways through its structuring of society along a particular conceptualization of the public-private divide that attempts to contain religion within the private sphere while effacing how it is present in the public sphere. That is to say, the political doctrine of liberal secularism has built into it a contradictory place for religion. Critiques of this doctrine of secularism (Asad, 1993; Mahmood, 2006) unsettle the association between ‘secularism’ and ‘secular’ by challenging the foundational dichotomy between the secular and religious that underpins liberal secularism. Drawing on Christian history and traditions, the doctrine of secularism produces and imposes a moral economy in its public and private spheres and deploys disciplinary mechanisms to define, confine and remake the religious

(Asad, 2003; Mahmood, 2006). Furthermore, religion occupies a paradoxical centrality within structures of secularism where religion not only serves as the constitutive outside of the secular, but it also serves as an intimately integral and enduring component of secularism. Thus, the secularity of normative definitions of the secular is brought into question.

Notably, this is not to say that the links between Christianity and secularism are categorically denied in dominant discourses of secularism. Rather, the immanence of Western Christianity and secularism is often narrated in terms of progress – implying that Christianity is a “divine parent metamorphosing into its human offspring (modernity), as transcendence embodying itself in worldly life (secularity), as the particular introducing the universal in thought” (Asad, 2009, p. 23). This teleological narrative thus constructs a separation between Christianity and secularism through a temporal displacement of Christianity as the origin of a universal secularism that is then safely tucked away through the separation of church and state. Moreover, as Alexander (2006) argues, this creates a “hierarchy that conflates Christianity with good tradition while consigning ‘others’ to the realm of bad tradition and thus to serve as evidence of the need for good Christian tradition” (p. 296). Christianity then acquires a special place in the progression of humanity – conceived of in universal terms – as a stalwart of secularism and what ultimately redeems humanity. This narrative itself bears a remarkable resemblance to Christian discourse of the redemption of humanity through the life, death, and transcendence of Jesus (Asad, 2009).

Returning to the question of how “religion” is defined as a normative category of analysis, the attribution of an “autonomous essence” to religion is thus entangled in the

particular history of the development of the doctrine of secularism in Europe. Sylvia Wynter (Scott, 2000), Gayatri Spivak (1999), Chandra Mohanty (2003) and others have sharpened our terms of reference by adding the prefix “ethno”, as in “ethnohumanism” and “ethnouniversalism”, to foreground the particularity of dominant articulations of normativity and, indeed, of ‘religion’. That is, “parochializing” (Mahmood, 2005) dominant terms of analysis such as ‘religion’ is integral to opening up analytical spaces for a meaningful consideration of the politics of piety.

The rendering of an ethnocentric or parochial articulation of ‘religion’ as “transhistorical” and “transcultural” (Asad, 1993, p. 28) can itself be read as an act of power that materializes through colonialism and imperialism. The ascendance of an ethnocentric conceptualization of ‘religion’ is tied to the construction of a universal trajectory of human progress that gained discursive power as an instrument of colonialism. As David Scott (2000) puts it, “humanism and colonialism inhabit the same cognitive-political universe inasmuch as Europe’s discovery of its Self is simultaneous with its discovery of its Others” (p. 120). This is not to say that colonialism has a monopoly on ‘humanism’, but rather, “modern liberalism deploys powers that are immeasurably greater, including the flexible power to construct a ‘universal, progressive history,’ which the other tradition does not possess” (Asad, 1993, p. 236). That is, the modern liberal “ethnohumanism” (Wynter in Scott, 2000) that parades as universal acquired discursive dominance through enactments of colonial power. The flexibility to construct and reconstruct the universal in alignment with shifting pursuits and objectives is a testament to the degree of power colonial discursive mechanisms retain over time and space. What remains constant is the ability and the impunity to make and assert claims on and about the universal.

Conceptualizations of the modern nation-state aid in producing and securing the universality of this ethnohumanism. The secularization thesis of modernity necessitates the movement towards secularism as a prerequisite for being considered modern (Asad, 2003). Thus, the normative temporality of the modern nation-state secures liberal secularism as a marker of progress. These temporal dynamics of the modern nation-state structure secular epistemologies through analytical frameworks that are ensnared in methodological nationalism. Manu Goswami (2004) defines methodological nationalism as follows:

...entailing the common practice of presupposing, rather than examining, the sociohistorical production of such categories as a national space and national economy and the closely related failure to analyze the specific global field within and against which specific nationalist movements emerged. (p. 4)

Taking up such categories as produced and entangled within sociohistorical contexts destabilizes conceptualizations of the nation-space as pre-given and territorially bounded. In other words, unpacking the production of national categories of analysis, rather than taking them for granted, uncovers the transnational and global constitution of the nation-state. Moreover, critiques of methodological nationalism expose how it works to dehistoricize the nation-state and, as Mongia (2012) suggests, present it within a “circular logic” where “the very notions – of nation, nationality and the nation-state – most in need of explanation are both the starting and ending points of analysis” (p. 201). That is, analyses operating through methodological nationalism invariably produce an analysis where the nation-state and its universality remains intact. In chapter three, I engage in a critique and dismantling of analytical associations between Pakistani women and Islam that are framed through the Pakistani nation-state by way of opening up a space to move beyond methodological nationalism in how women’s discourses of piety are perceived.

Analytical framings that are bounded by the nation-state preclude what Asad (2003) refers to as “complex time” and “complex space” (p. 179). Complex space, according to Asad, refers to how space is neither autonomous nor contained in absolute ways, in contrast to what the notion of borders might suggest. Rather, space impinges on, overlaps with, and leaks through resulting in complex entanglements with the outside and the other (Asad, 2003, p. 178). Asad (2003) conceptualizes complex time as a means to think about the heterogeneity of temporality and the multiple and shifting notions and relationships between the past, present, and future, that are obfuscated through the secular time of the nation-state (p. 179). For Asad, complex time and complex space are useful ways of foregrounding the transnational, heterogeneous and intersectional ways in which the nation-space is inhabited, and thereby undo its boundedness.

This has important implications for how we think about the relationship between the modern nation-state and secular definitions of religion. What are the analytical possibilities and limitations of grasping the Islamic discourse of the women I conducted research with as ‘Pakistani’? As Mongia (2012) reminds us, the “dominant tendency of area studies to inquire into the specificities of national and native cultures has served to essentialize culture and suture it to space”, thus producing culture as “space-specific” and displacing questions of temporality (p. 198). As such, it is necessary to undo the equivalencies made between culture and the nation-state. At the same time, however, Mongia (2012) suggests that critical interventions in cultural studies and transnational studies that attempt to unmoor culture from the nation-space have often elided a historicization of the state and have resulted in the persistence of a type of methodological nationalism, which she refers to as “methodological stateism” (p. 202). Avoiding

methodological nationalism does not translate to ignoring an analysis of the nation-state, rather, it means to historicize the nation-state and unsettle it from its privileged place as a pre-given unit of analysis. In turn, the transnational cannot only be taken up as the space between nation-states or outside of nation-states because this approach would contradictorily re-centre the nation-state and again leave it intact as a unit of analysis. For Mongia (2012), formulations of the transnational are beholden to the nation-state in paradoxical ways because they already conceptualize it in national terms, as the “nomenclature” suggests (p. 203). She suggests that a more productive approach would consider the way the nation and transnational are “temporally and spatially co-dependent” (Mongia, 2012, p. 211) in heterogeneous and shifting ways, which would lead to a historicization of both the nation-state and the transnational.

The multi-sited dynamics of power discussed above construct, protect, and reify the secular subject as the quintessential ideal of modernity. The political doctrine of secularism prescribes scripts for the secular subject’s practice, place, and role of religion that are entrenched in notions of progress as movements towards liberal secularism.

Mahmood (2006) suggests:

the political solution offered by the doctrine of secularism resides not so much in the separation of state and religion or in the granting of religious freedoms, but in the kind of subjectivity that a secular culture authorizes, the practices it redeems as truly (versus superficially) spiritual, and the particular relationship to history that it prescribes. (p. 328)

In other words, the doctrine of secularism does not do away with religion entirely, nor does it adequately address the politics of governance in religiously pluralistic societies. Rather, secularism constructs a monolithic and singular ideal of how to be religious within a secular framework – or, in other words, how to be a secular religious subject. The

translation of non-Western religions through this episteme, then, requires arbitration, selection, and repudiation in order to make a set of beliefs and practices intelligible under normative secular conceptualizations of religion, which in turn are invested in producing and securing the secular subject. Religious subjectivities that do not correspond to scripts of the normative secular subject occupy an insidious and vulnerable space within such liberal secular epistemological frameworks as inimical to progress and modernity.

### **Translating 'Islam'**

Islam is made to enter this ethnocentric discursive terrain as a primitive and static religion that is intrinsically incapable of separating church and state and, therefore, as unable to produce and progress to secularism the way Western Christianity did. The definition of religion inaugurated through the doctrine of secularism produces a monolithic and teleological conception of Islam as primitive in comparison to the West. This not only assumes a distinct separation between Islam and the West that has been problematized profusely in critical academic analysis (Abu-Lughod, 1998; L. Ahmed, 1993; Moallem, 2001), but it also mobilizes 'Islam' as a homogenizing concept. As Edward Said (1997) asks, "how really useful is 'Islam' as a concept for understanding Morocco *and* Saudi Arabia *and* Syria *and* Indonesia" (p. 1v, emphasis in original)? For Saadia Toor (2011a), the contemporary mobilization of 'Islam' as a unitary concept is part of the ideological framework necessitated by neo-colonial projects – primarily led by the United States – in the 'Muslim world' (para. 2). Because 'Islam' is implicated within these ideological frameworks, it is imperative to unpack dominant usage and foreground the heterogeneity

and specificity of how it is being used in this dissertation. As such, in this section I explicate some of the epistemological foreclosures that occur in analyses of 'Islam'.

Several scholars have turned to "fundamentalist Islam", ostensibly the most repugnant manifestation of Islam to the West, to argue against the construction of the simplistic binary opposition of Islam and the West. As Leila Ahmed (1993) puts it, fundamentalist Islam "is an Islam redefining itself against the assaults of the West but also an Islam revitalized and reimagined as a result of its fertilization by and its appropriation of the languages and ideas given currency by the discourses of the West" (p. 236). That is, the permeability and porosity of the boundary between 'Islam' and the 'West' is evident when one recognizes that encounters with the 'West' are constitutive of fundamentalist discourse and, indeed, as Lila Abu-Lughod argues, vice versa. Minoo Moallem (2001) similarly suggests that the relationship between Islam and the West is a contemporaneous and co-constitutive one: "fundamentalism...is a by-product of the process of modernization and in dialogue with modernity" (p. 122). Claims of Islam being fixed in a primitive version of normative conceptions of religion thus invoke a false dichotomy between Islam and the West and construct Islam as an aberration in the universal teleology of the progress of religion toward secularism.

Furthermore, in liberal iterations of secularism, (non-Judeo-Christian) religion is not only considered to be the antithesis of modernity and rationality but also, as Jasbir Puar (2007) argues, it is considered to be "always already pathological" (p. 55). Religious violence then, is considered to be gratuitous in the modern imaginary in a way that, for example, state violence is not (Asad, 1993). Anxieties over this pathology are evident, for example, in the way the demonization of "political Islam" is constructed in contemporary



geopolitics as a failure of the separation between religion and politics and in the ensuing moral panic over this violation. These discursive constructions of political Islam exemplify how Islam is homogenized as “mired in religion, primitivity, and backwardness” (Said, 1997, p. 10). In her analysis of discourses of terrorism, Puar (2007) points to US foreign policy documents to demonstrate how this pathological quality is reserved to describe the activities of ‘Islamic fundamentalists’ and is not extended to Christian or Jewish fundamentalists. Puar (2007) suggests that Christian and Jewish fundamentalists then not only fall out of the purview of the category of ‘terrorism’ but are, in absentia, “rendered on par with...state terrorisms of Israel and the United States” (p. 56). She interprets the absence of Christian and Jewish fundamentalists from these documents as an indication of the imbrications of these fundamentalisms with state violence.

The ever-present potentiality of gratuitous violence in followers of Islam is constructed through attributing a “magical quality” to Islamic texts where the texts are both “univocal” and “infectious” – a quality that is not attributed to Judeo-Christian texts in the same way (Asad, 2003, p. 11). In other words, the flexibility and plurality of interpretations of Islamic texts is denied, even as that of Christian and Jewish texts is maintained. Such differentiated repudiations of religious identities often authorized by the Western states and their foreign policies entrenches Orientalist understandings of Islam and Muslims and gives license to Islamophobia in the name of secular progress. Junaid Rana (2011) argues that Islamophobia is part of a long history of constructing “monstrous races” (p. 36) in the project of empire through the trope of religion. He traces the historical interconnections between the tropes of religion and race to argue that Islam is not only mobilized in terms of religion but also as a racial category. Through the example of how

religion was used as a measure of human evolution in Christian European encounters with Native American populations in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, Rana (2011) suggests that the concept of race was inseparable from religion. He further suggests that preceding European encounters with the Muslim Moors established the religio-racial lexicon that was then used to racialize and colonize the Americas. For Rana (2011), the “scientific racism” that developed through the Enlightenment obscured these connections between religion and race, as religion became a purportedly discrete category via secularism (p. 34). However, contemporary articulations of Islamophobia betray the persistence of the interconnections between race and religion as can be seen in the essentialization of Muslims as beholden to static, totalizing and omnipotent Islamic texts. Static and singularized conceptualizations of Islamic text, then, can be seen as part of the ontological basis for the construction of ‘Muslim’ as a racialized category of difference.

Notably, constructions of Muslims as beholden to Islamic texts are entangled in secular epistemologies of religion and colonial histories and practices of governance. More specifically, in the South Asian context, colonial practices of enumeration and codification centralized the Quran in conceptualizations of Islam, which in effect, reified and/or constructed the populations they sought to know in order to govern the colonies (Appadurai, 1996; Bose & Jalal, 1997; Chatterjee, 1993; Cohn, 1996; Jalal, 2000; Metcalf & Metcalf, 2002). The Quran came to occupy a palimpsestic yet foundational role in the codification of Islam and Islamic law and the categorization of Muslims in colonial India (Metcalf & Metcalf, 2002). Enacting a gesture of so-called colonial benevolence, the British Raj attempted to incorporate separate religious personal laws for Hindus and Muslims into their liberal governance structures, which required the codification of Hinduism and Islam

such that they were intelligible within a secular system based on “rule-of-law” (Metcalf, 2009, p. 35; Metcalf & Metcalf, 2002, p. 57). The static text was further necessitated in the interest of reducing reliance on ‘native’ religious authorities, dispossessing local jurists, and facilitating neutral, unmediated, direct access to an authoritative compendium of religious laws for the colonial administration to use for adjudication (Jalal, 2000; Metcalf & Metcalf, 2002). As many critiques of colonialism in India have pointed out, this not only constructed ‘Hindu’ and ‘Muslim’ political and legal categories resulting in the solidification and intensification of caste and sectarian hierarchies and ‘communal’ divisions and conflicts, it also, relatedly, reduced a multiplicity of religious practices into a treacherously simple duality of Hindu and Muslim (Bose & Jalal, 1997; Metcalf & Metcalf, 2002; Thapar, 1989).

In addition to the reduction of the plurality of Islamic practices, the construction of these categories that centralized the text also denied the possibility of the porosity of Islam as it historically formed dialectically in the context of South Asia (Bose & Jalal, 1997; Jalal, 2000; Metcalf, 2009; Thapar, 1989). The entangled development of Muslim and Hindu religious practices prior to British colonization thus finds no place within the hardened boundaries in the colonial schematic of South Asian religious identities. The category of the Muslim (and also the Hindu) was in turn bifurcated only to the end of erecting the figures of good and bad Muslims, to put it in Mahmood Mamdani’s (2004) terms – a simple but powerful discursive trick that has proven its resilience as it continues to inform and sustain contemporary forms of imperialism. Moreover, in line with the methodical yet capricious workings of empire, the contents of the categories of the good and bad Muslim shift over time and space in service of old and new imperial projects. While the Islamic modernism of

'Sir' Sayid Ahmed Khan and the like consistently endures as the poster-child for the preferred mode of engagement with Islamic texts because of their 'poetic' reading of the text, at times some strands of Sufism also acquired favour for their purportedly benign devotionism, and at still other times 'fundamentalist' groups have received support because of the militancy which allegedly emerges out of a literalist approach (Hirschkind & Mahmood, 2002; Jalal, 2000; Mahmood, 2006; Metcalf, 2009).

The normative association between Islam and the Quran in the South Asian context is thus mired within the legacy of colonial "epistemic violence" (Spivak, 1999, p. 280) that rendered the plurality and relationality of religious practices invisible. As Asad (2003) points out, the multiplicity of meanings attributed to the text requires an analytical framing that is attentive to the particularity of a given tradition. He states:

...the way people engage with such complex and multifaceted texts, translating their sense and relevance, is a complicated business involving disciplines and traditions of reading, personal habit and temperament, as well as the perceived demands of particular social situations. (Asad, 2003, p. 10)

Moreover, homogenizing Islam by privileging scripture reifies what Leila Ahmed (1993) refers to as "establishment Islam" (p. 239) – historically situated interpretations of Islam by the politically dominant who had the means to induct their interpretations into doctrine. Most notably, according to Ahmed, establishment Islam is a reflection of the social and cultural norms of the Abbasid period<sup>49</sup> because the Abbasid dynasty contributed most heavily to the codification of legal and institutional doctrine (p. 238).

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<sup>49</sup> The Abbasid period refers to evolution of Islam during the rule of the Abbasid Caliphate established in 750. See Leila Ahmed (1993) for a discussion of the influence of the Abbasid dynasty on how Islam was codified and disseminated.

The suppression of the heterogeneity of Islam is not only about the suppression of multiple interpretive practices, but it is also a marginalization of non-textual and non-androcentric practices of Islam. Leila Ahmed (1993) frames these elisions as a consequence of the tension between establishment Islam and the “ethical voice” of Islamic societies (p. 239). For Ahmed, the ‘ethical voice’ of Islam refers to the multiplicity of Islamic praxis in lived experiences, which counters claims to one pure version of Islam purported through “establishment Islam” (p. 239). She further argues that the social and political formations linked to the “ethical voice” of Islam indicate an ethic of equality that establishment Islam denies. However, while Ahmed’s (1993) conception of the ethical voice of Islam is one that reiterates “the equal humanity of all” (p. 229), I would add that the ethical voice of Islam is what reveals its contextual relationality, that is to say, ‘Islam’ is lived and experienced in multiple ways and is constituted dialectically through particular encounters in particular social contexts – including encounters with establishment Islam. This is not to say that the ethical voice of Islam is any more pure or any less problematic than establishment Islam or even that it is completely separate from establishment Islam, but, rather, that ‘establishment Islam’ is not a totalizing representation of Islam, even though it is often deployed as such. Thus, the colonial discursive privilege accorded to a scripture based Islam is an ahistorical and flawed project insofar as it depends on invoking a particular manifestation of ‘Islam’, while denying its particularity. This invocation results in the construction of ‘Islamic subjects’ as essentially passive and submissive in face of scripture, which, in turn, is conceived of as a totalizing and powerful force. So, Islam is not only essentialized, but the possibility of nuances in relationships between Islam and Islamic subjects even within a scriptural conception of ‘Islam’ is obscured.

The construction of Islam as inherently incapable of progressing to secularism thus relies on a secular epistemology of religion that structures a series of essentializations and exclusions. The narrative of the progression of the enlightened ideal secular subject of modernity stands as a contrast to conceptualizations of passive, yet potentially violent, Islamic subjects beholden to singular and totalizing Islamic scripture. The setting up of this contrast relies on effacing the co-constitutive relationships between Islam and the West, fixing the text as central to the practice of Islam – which is in itself entangled with colonial histories of governance in the context of South Asia – and emptying Islamic subjects of agency in their relationships to Islam. Such reductive and homogenizing conceptualizations of Islam also exclude Islamic practices that do not revolve around the text or that take the text up differently, thus muting the multiplicity of Islamic praxis.

The women I interviewed identified as espousing a text-centric and literalist understanding of Islam. Within a liberal secular epistemological framework, their literalist approach signals a lack of agency that cements their status as passive but dangerous pawns under the command of omnipotent texts. However, their relationships to scripture are complex, fluid, and, at times, fraught. Moreover, singularized and static definitions of Islam elide my respondents' understanding of *taqwa* as a continuous and ongoing process. That is, even though these women centralize the text, this does not translate to a static conceptualization of scripture or of what it means to be a Muslim.

### **S/subject of 'Feminism'**

Theorizations of the relationships between women and Islam are not only truncated by dominant conceptualizations of Islam, but also by the universalisms underpinning

dominant understandings of feminism. The notion that 'feminism' is 'women' having 'agency' in face of 'patriarchy' persists, for example, in the debate on the possibilities and limitations of Islam as a vehicle for feminism (see chapter three). Many feminists of colour have intervened in this conceptualization of feminism by questioning the basis of 'women' as a universal category of analysis denoting homogeneous desires, interests and ideals. These interventions have brought in an analysis of race as it operates in the universalization of this category.

Critiques of the category 'women' by feminists of colour stem from the need to address the hegemonic status of white, Western feminism. By foregrounding differences and plurality within this purportedly homogeneous category, these critiques provide some insight into the types of violences, exclusions, and omissions that constitute dominant ideas and practices of feminism. As Sylvia Wynter (Scott, 2000) suggests, variables such as 'race' insert a contradiction "into the consolidated field of meanings of the ostensibly 'universal' theory of feminism", which at one time was itself a disruption of the universal theories of "Liberal Humanism" and "Marxism/Leninism" through its insertion of the variable 'gender' (p. 357). In other words, dominant theories of feminism perpetuate the same epistemic violences as those they were meant to disrupt. Moreover, these epistemic violences secure universalist ideas by constructing a "consolidated field' of being/feeling/knowing" that presumes and produces an ideal feminist subject through multiple sites (Wynter, 1990, p. 364). Chandra Mohanty (2003) suggests that these violences are due to the analytical foreclosure generated through the category 'women'. She argues that Western feminism discursively colonizes this category through an a priori suppression of the heterogeneity of this category of analysis. In addition to assuming the homogeneity of 'women', this

analytical foreclosure occurs through the centralization of the “authorial subject” as the “primary referent of theory and praxis” (Mohanty, 2003, p. 64).

Responding to the absence of women of colour and queer women from the category ‘women’, Valerie Amos and Pratibha Parmar (1984) argue that the inability of white feminism to incorporate and account for difference is a testament to the farcicality of their claims to a universal womanhood. Rather, as Amos and Parmar (1984) suggest in reference to the problematic of the discursive treatment of black women, “the process of accounting for their historical and contemporary position does, in itself, challenge the use of some of the central categories and assumptions of recent mainstream feminist thought” (p. 4). Thus, the inability of feminist theory to speak to the experiences of Muslim women, for example, is not just about the absence of Muslim women – therefore, it is not simply a matter of correcting the absence by making Muslim women present. Muslim women’s experiences bring the very basis of mainstream feminism into question by challenging the universal applicability of the foundational categories, modes of understanding, and eschatological assumptions of feminism.

It is important to note, however, that feminist claims of universalism have not ignored the question of difference altogether; rather, it is precisely their incorporation of difference that motivates the critiques of their universalism. Difference, in dominant feminism, is understood through a pre-given and universalized trajectory for all women; that is, a universalized feminist teleology forms the basis of understandings of difference and thus constrains and disciplines it. Feminism, then, becomes a prescriptive project that acts to correct deviations from this trajectory and/or an evaluative project that assesses ‘women’ and places them along the trajectory in relation to a universal telos. Moreover, the



ways in which Western feminism incorporates difference fortifies the universal claims of its categories of analysis.

The privileging of 'women' as a universal basis of feminist solidarity assumes a common oppression and exonerates women from complicity in oppressive systems and practices. In other words, while the category of 'women' is presented as inclusive of all women, it obscures the unequal and hierarchal relations between women that this category perpetuates. For instance, Mohanty (2003) contends that the construction of the sub-category of "third world woman" is premised on a Western self as the yardstick for developmental goals and is symptomatic of an asymmetrical relation of power that is made invisible through claims to universality (21). Furthermore, it narrates the encounter between Western and third world women as occurring at the moment of developmentalist intervention, thus effacing a history of imperialism. The third-world woman is incorporated into a universal trajectory as the other or the "not (like) us (yet)" (S. Ahmed, 2000, p. 165). Western feminist selves are thus constructed as the primary referent, ideal, and telos, which enables the persistence of unequal relationships under the guise of feminist solidarity. This centralization of the Western self in feminist theory elides an intersectional analysis that would account for the multiple and simultaneous categories that inform processes of subject formation.

That this problematic runs deeper than a question of absence/presence or visibility/invisibility is even more pronounced in attempts in mainstream feminism to incorporate difference and address exclusions. Such attempts to reconsolidate the category of 'woman' as the basis of feminist solidarity in response to encounters with differences amongst women have morphed into evaluative anthropological projects

enmeshed in the power matrices of knowledge production. Amos and Parmar (1984) argue that anthropological works have rendered black women as “subjects for interesting and exotic comparison” (p. 6). The comparative impetus of such anthropological projects invariably includes a yardstick against which other women’s progress is measured. As Amos and Parmar (1984) point out,

There is no apology for, nay awareness even, of the contradictions of white feminists as anthropologists studying village women in India, Africa, China for evidence of feminist consciousness and female solidarity. (p. 6)

Such projects exemplify what Radhika Mongia (2007) characterizes as the effacement of power that occurs through the “standardization” of units of analysis. She suggests that standardization implies equivalence, obscuring the ways in which comparative analysis is “the standardization of inequality structured through the *form of equivalence*” (p. 410, emphasis in original). The category of ‘women’ as a unit of comparative analysis, then, is a form of equivalence that obscures how this category produces hierarchal difference.

In this sense, comparative frameworks both presume and produce a subject. Spivak makes a crucial distinction between the “philosophical and ethical Subject” conceived in universal or transcendental terms, and “political subjects”, as in the “king’s subjects”, conceived of as a relation of power (Birla, 2002, p. 90). She argues that conceptions of the subject-as-agent are predicated on the philosophical ethical Subject and elide an understanding of political subjection as a relation of power. Moreover, by attributing agency to Subjects and subjects in the same way, relations of power and oppression are covered over (Birla, 2002, p. 8). Spivak (1999) makes this distinction between the Subject and subject to call into question the “transparency” claimed by Western intellectuals that is based on a conflation of these two notions of S/subject. She argues:

The S/subject, curiously sewn together into a transparency by denegations, belongs to the exploiters' side of the international division of labour. It is impossible for contemporary French intellectuals to imagine the kind of Power and Desire that would inhabit the unnamed subject of the Other of Europe. It is not only that everything they read, critical or uncritical, is caught within the debate of the production of that Other, supporting or critiquing the constitution of the subject as Europe. It is also that, in the constitution of that Other of Europe, great care was taken to obliterate the textual ingredients with which such a subject could cathect, could occupy (invest?) its itinerary. (Spivak, 1999, p. 265)

Knowledge production about the other as the Other invariably recentres the Subject while denying spaces of alterity. For Spivak (Spivak, 1999), individualistic denegations made by Western intellectuals that proclaim a non-judgmental or non-universalizing stance do little by way of curbing the epistemic violence enacted through the Subject as "irreducible methodological presupposition" (p. 265). The discursive orientation of the subject towards or in relation to the Subject remain in such epistemological frameworks.

In addition, such comparative projects that reify the Subject are complicit in the developmentalist logics through which colonialism and modern day imperialism are justified, where the native other is understood as being on the same developmental trajectory as the colonizer but not as far along, thus justifying intervention as an ethical imperative. The issue then is not that there is no attempt to incorporate difference, but that the attempts themselves are inflected with power that is then obscured in order to posit an ontological and teleological universality – which is underpinned by assumptions of an ethical universality. Moreover, as Sunera Thobani (2010) argues, the process of incorporating difference in this way also contributes to the construction of a "fantasy" (p. 131) of Western benevolence and innocence, which is integral to the imperialist logics and practices of intervention. Thus, engaging in a comparative and, ultimately, evaluative project does little to make space for differences in epistemologies; in fact, the reiteration

and imposition of the dominant episteme in this way reinforces exclusions under the guise of inclusion.

For instance, in contemporary discourses of terrorism, the construction of Islam as a patriarchal religion and the saving of Muslim women as a feminist imperative are based on a secular discourse of tradition (religion) and modernity (secular), where the lived experiences of Muslim women are refracted through this dichotomy. The racialized and gendered body of the Muslim woman comes to be known through the reductive frame of this secular epistemology, severed from the multiple structures of power and modes of subject formation that constitute lived experiences. Thus, the ways in which 'Islam' is mobilized as a gendered category of difference reveals how such comparative projects operate through secular epistemologies.

### **Spiritual as Epistemological**

The exclusion of non-secular knowledges and subjectivities from the category of the modern is based on the disavowal of the contemporaneity of religious knowledge and modes of subject formation. The cosmological systems constituting spiritual knowledge and practice are made to figure as static cultural artifacts that are evidence of the persistence of tradition and lack of progress, rather than an epistemology. But what would it mean to take the sacred seriously? Alexander suggests that taking the sacred seriously means to "shake the archives of secularism" through an understanding of the spiritual as epistemological and not as "lapses outside the bounds of rationality" (Alexander, 2006, p. 327). She argues that the spiritual must be taken into consideration as epistemological,

rather than as a cultural remnant understood within the linear temporality of secular time that imagines the progress of time as the movement from tradition to modernity.

Walter D. Mignolo (2000) suggests that conceptualizations of secular temporality acquire normative epistemic status through the “subalternization of knowledge” (p. 59). He argues that the veneer of universality acquired by the temporality of modernity is inextricable from colonial processes of the subalternization of knowledge and the related denial of intersubjectivity (Mignolo, 2000, pp. 59–60). That is, the rational subject at the heart of the colonial project produces a subject-object relationship with the other that, in turn, renders the other as the “known subject” and the self as the “knowing subject” (Mignolo, 2000, p. 60). The denial of the other as a knowing subject in effect denies forms of knowledge, and the related temporalities of subject formation, that are rendered unintelligible within a colonial paradigm. Furthermore, the temporal-spatial collapse underpinning colonial discourse renders othered forms of knowledge and modes of subject formation as failed, backwards, or invisible leading to legitimization, expansion and entrenchment of colonial power.

The propensity to subjugate othered epistemologies is apparent in the re-entrenchment of the universalist strand of feminism through the War on Terror. For instance, the figure of the oppressed Muslim woman has been deployed as a powerful trope to reconsolidate and justify the re-establishment of a universal ethic for feminist theory and praxis (Thobani, 2010; Toor, 2011a). Comparative frameworks that take up ‘Islam’ and the ‘West’ as separate and stable categories have yielded the “West’s gendered subject as the mark of the ‘universal’, and the world of the Muslim gendered subject as that of death, violence, and misogyny” (Thobani, 2010, p. 129). Considered in relation to these

discursive frameworks, the need to “save” oppressed Muslim women not only suggests saving someone from something, but also saving someone to something (Abu-Lughod, 2002). That is, there is a universalized idea of what is good for everyone implicit in the logic of “saving”. In mainstream feminist discourses of the War on Terror, for example, the Muslim woman must be saved from the religious to the secular. The very possibility of the spiritual as epistemological is negated at the outset of constructing a universal feminist subject that then serves the ultimate legitimization of a sort of ethical imperialism through the logic of intervention for the purposes of ‘saving them’ for their own good.

The idea of ‘saving’ the oppressed Muslim woman is also indicative of the hierarchical ordering of the secular and the religious. Alexander (2006) suggests that secular feminist desires to save or cure women from becoming “consorts of manly male gods” depends on an a priori “masculinization of the social organization of the Sacred” (p. 323). That is, the need to save women from religion is premised on a pre-defined conceptualization of religion as masculine and patriarchal. For example, in Leela Fernandes’s (2003) otherwise constructive theorization of “spiritualized feminism” as transformative feminist practice, she suggests the need for recuperating spirituality from “conservative religious and political forces” (p. 9). She refers to this process as the “decolonization of the divine” (p. 11). Untangling spirituality from its association with institutionalized religion is key to this process of decolonization in her view. Moreover, for Fernandes (2003) the colonization of the spiritual occurs not only through its monopolization by institutionalized religion, but also through its repudiation by secular feminists. That is, secular feminists throw the baby out with the bath water, so to speak, when they excise spirituality from feminist praxis for the sake of fighting against

“conservative” religious forces. By removing its association with “conservative” forces, Fernandes (2003) suggests that spirituality can be reclaimed for social justice, and also that social justice is unachievable without spirituality. While decolonizing “spirituality” in this way is important in that it counters hegemonic scripts of religiosity and makes space for difference, it is based on a perception of ‘religion’ as inherently and irredeemably anti-feminist. This precludes a consideration of the agency of women involved in institutionalized religion and exemplifies how feminism is sutured to the secular in ways that affirm secularism as the ultimate guarantor of freedom and equality.

Such antithetical relationships between ‘religion’ and ‘feminism’ rely on layers of discursive colonization. Decolonizing the divine would not only require us to grapple with the ways in which these normative categories of analysis are constructed and mobilized through secular epistemologies but also to understand the spiritual as epistemological (Alexander, 2006). Several scholars turn to practices of religious subject making through the development of piety in order to explicate the spiritual as epistemological. As discussed earlier, secular frameworks (informed by the doctrine of secularism) relegate religion to the private sphere in complex ways. Piety, in turn, is located even deeper in the private sphere as a mode of existence where individuals enact certain disciplinary practices focused on their own individual body and mind with limited orchestrated activities in the public sphere – a conception that is informed by the history of the development of the Christian tradition and its counterpart, secularism (Asad, 1993, p. 205; Mahmood, 2005, p. 4). Read within a secular framework, women’s piety is a sign of their relegation to the private sphere and the disciplining of their bodies via (patriarchal) religion. In turn, Muslim women’s piety groups, like the ones emerging through Al-Huda and the Jamaat, are

characterized as a step in the wrong direction since their engagement with 'Islam' is not necessarily premised on gender-progressive goals. Moreover, the piety groups discussed in this dissertation affirm the authority of men over women as part of their practice of piety, which is easily read as regressive especially within the frameworks discussed above.

Some scholars such as Lara Deeb (2006), Sherine Hafez (2011), and Saba Mahmood (2005) argue that dominant feminist frameworks lead to reductive and over simplified understandings of piety movements and practices of piety. Mahmood's (2005) influential work on the women's "*da'wa* movement" in Egypt has led to key analytical shifts in the discussion on 'Islam' and 'feminism' on multiple fronts. In particular, Mahmood draws on the experiences of Muslim women in an Egyptian piety movement to illustrate the epistemic traps of secular frameworks. Most significantly, it is her reconceptualization of 'agency' that has opened up a space to push the limits of theorizations of Islam and feminism. Mahmood (2005) makes two interventions in mainstream feminist theories of agency through her analysis of piety that are particularly relevant to the theoretical framing of this dissertation: One, a reconfiguration of the relationship between desire and agency and, two, an expansion of the meaning of agency beyond the framework of subordination and resistance to include "inhabiting norms" (p. 15) as a form of agency.

Mahmood (2005) makes the first intervention by interrogating assumptions about interiority and exteriority of the subject. She suggests that the development of piety is not premised on a unidirectional relationship between interiority and exteriority – as assumptions about mind/body in liberal subjects might suggest. In other words, the formation of a pious Muslim subject in the *da'wa* movement proceeds through embodied practices that mobilize the body as a sign of as well as a medium for piety (Mahmood, 2005,



p. 122). To illustrate, Mahmood (2005) gives the example of performing the Islamic ritual of *salat* five times a day (p. 123). For members of the *da'wa* movement, performing *salat* is not only an action that signifies the fulfillment of a ritual, but it is also a means through which the desire to perform *salat* is inculcated through repetition, affective attachment, and experiencing beneficial results in mental and physical health. Thus, to bring this alignment of the interior (desire) and exterior (action) into being, the *da'wa* movement includes 'desire' as an "object of pedagogy" (Mahmood, 2005, p. 123) that is produced through embodied practice and, notably, does not necessitate or privilege the presence of desire prior to action. This reconfiguration opens up a space for engaging with piety as a complex site of agency in that it cannot be measured against liberal prerequisites of freedom and autonomy of desire and, indeed, the desire for freedom and autonomy. Thus, the evaluative function of conceptions of desire and agency that has conventionally been used to measure levels of oppression or resistance is rendered moot.

The second key intervention that Mahmood (2005) makes in theorizing agency is to move beyond the framework of subordination and resistance and include "inhabiting norms" (p. 15), where norms are the "scaffolding" (p. 148) through which the subject is realized, as a form of agency. As Mahmood (2005) suggests, secular approaches to social phenomenon flatten the scope of human experience to either succumbing to or resisting relations of domination. Approaching the gendered body only as symbol, for example, would be limiting in an analysis of piety in that it renders the body a passive site of signification of either individual or collective will or of normative discourses. Instead, Mahmood (2005) frames pious subject formation in the *da'wa* movement in Aristotelian

terms as a movement toward habitus,<sup>50</sup> that is, the co-alignment of the interior with the exterior through a mutually constitutive relationship between the two (p. 136). This stands in contrast to, for example, English Puritanism where piety refers to the formation of inward spiritual states (Mahmood, 2005). Mahmood (2005) argues that inhabiting norms through iteration is a form of agency not only because performativity disrupts norms, but also because it consolidates them. Through this conceptualization, we can simultaneously de-centre acts of resistance as indicators of agency and initiate a conversation on piety as an act of agency. This is not to say that piety cannot be resistant, rather, the point is that resistance is not the only way we can read piety as agential. This intervention in theories of agency again places politics within the purview of piety by recasting piety in the idiom of inhabitation rather than submission. As such, this intervention in the literature facilitates a discussion about women and Islam beyond a question of whether or not Muslim women have agency and into a conversation about the spiritual or sacred epistemologies that give meaning to practices of piety.

Being cognizant of the epistemological pitfalls discussed throughout this chapter, I suggest that the conceptualization and practices of piety that emerge out of the women's groups discussed in this dissertation not be read within a rigid framework of the universal and the particular. Rather, drawing on the critical scholarship on religion and the work of feminists of colour, I argue for a reading of this "local" form of piety that is attentive to its "genealogy", "systematicity" and "historicity" (Alexander & Mohanty, 2013; Grewal &

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<sup>50</sup> Mahmood (2005) distinguishes her use of the Aristotelian conceptualization of habitus as distinct from Pierre Bourdieu's theorization of habitus, which she suggests is tied to the often unintended or unconscious formation of dispositions. For Mahmood, the Aristotelian habitus includes an emphasis on the acquisition of a moral or practical craft through deliberate practice and learning until it becomes part of the self, which she suggests resonates more closely with the practices of piety of the women she conducted research with (136).

Kaplan, 1994; Mahmood, 2005; Scott, 2000; Spivak, 1999). While on one hand I want to provide a sense of how piety is thought of within the discourse of these groups, this is not, on the other hand, to suggest a reductionist particularizing narrative of a local/authentic version of piety isolated from broader power relations. I engage with how women conceptualize and inhabit their piety in relational and shifting ways.

Many anthropologists and historians turn to the “local” as a site of explicating more appropriate and authentic explanatory terms in order to redress the inadequacy of universalized terms of reference. However, in addition to the danger of romanticizing the “local” and the power imbalances inherent in rendering something “locateable”, they often succumb to the trappings of isolating the “local” or the “authentic” in accounts of non-Western religious practices in the name of unsettling normative definitions of religion (Asad, 1993, p. 9). Mahmood’s (2005) work, for instance, succumbs to this limitation to an extent in the interest of “parochializing” (p. 191) the universalized terms of reference that could be projected onto a reading of the Egyptian women’s *da’wa* movement. While Mahmood’s interventions in theories of agency are integral to unpacking the politics of piety, she seems to limit her analysis to “Islamic norms” as the only scaffolding through which the pious self is realized - as though “Islamic norms” are discrete and exist in isolation. Mahmood (2005) recognizes that “the relationship between Islamism and liberal secularity is one of proximity and coimbrication rather than a simple opposition or, for that matter, accommodation” (p. 25). However, her analysis implicitly upholds a dichotomy between the piety of the *da’wa* movement and secular-liberal values through the language of “Islamic norms”.

To some extent this reduction is understandable given the tendency in scholarship on religion to reduce religious practices to social phenomenon at the expense of a cosmological or transcendental understanding of religion. This tendency poses the risk of projecting liberal society as a universalized horizon, which confines any alternative formations within dominant epistemological frameworks or conceives of them as exceptions facing the looming inevitability of their eventual (re)orientation toward the universal horizon (Asad, 2003; Chakrabarty, 2007; Mahmood, 2005; Mehta, 1999; Scott, 2013; Spivak, 1999). Many have pointed to “translation” (Asad, 1993; Mahmood, 2005; Mehta, 1999; Spivak, 1999) as the moment at which, for instance, the presence of practices that walk and talk like liberalism can mistakenly be read in hegemonic terms as liberal and as constitutive of liberal subjectivities at the expense of a more nuanced analysis of these practices and the social and political imaginaries of those practicing them. For instance, in her book exploring the relationship between secularization and Islamism in Pakistan, Humeira Iqtidar (2011) argues that the coimbrication of secularism and Islamism alone is not necessarily indicative of the formation of liberal subjectivities even though secularism is a central liberal value. Mahmood (2005) also includes words of caution in her book about the “analytic foreclosure” that accompanies the “teleological certainty” of a “cosmopolitan horizon” (pp. 197-198).

Mahmood’s emphasis on ‘Islamic norms’ is in some ways an effort to foreground the spiritual as epistemological. However, theorizing the spiritual as epistemological does not mean that we empty it of relations of power. Spiritual epistemologies are not just epistemologies of the spiritual – that is, it is not only about how practices identified as part of the development of piety are given meaning. Rather, to consider the spiritual as

epistemological would mean to “pry open the terms, symbols, and organizational codes” that are used “to make sense of the world” (Alexander, 2006, p. 293). Thus, it is important to consider how spiritual epistemologies give meaning to the “world”.

The web of normativity women in piety groups are drawing on and consolidating consists of more than “Islamic norms” and, moreover, “Islamic norms” is not a stable category of analysis. Hafez (2011) and Deeb (2006), respectively, draw our attention to Suad Joseph’s conceptualization of religious subject making as “relational” to emphasize complex imbrications of multiple, inseparable discourses. As Hafez (2011) suggests in her work with Egyptian women activists involved in al-Hilal, reductive understandings of Islamic practices are symptomatic of how the “religious subject” is employed as a unit of analysis that is distinct from the “modern subject” (p. 27). Hafez argues against assuming a “bounded subject” (p. 29) because of the limits it places on how we understand subjecthood and processes of subject making. She instead suggests that “subject making cannot be understood as a continuous process within a single paradigm” but, rather, “subject making should be considered as deeply embedded in wider, complex, and imbricated social and historical processes” (p. 5). This emphasis on the multiplicity and simultaneity of discourses and processes of subject formation is also reflected in Deeb’s (2006) work on women’s Shi’i piety groups loosely associated with Hizbullah in Lebanon. For instance, she gives the example of how the women she worked with articulated the relationship between “scientific rationality” and Islam where “the two are able to coexist in an enchanted modern” (Deeb, 2006, p. 28). Deeb suggests that this relationship unravels normative notions of a secular modern based on an opposition between science and religion. Through her conceptualization of the “enchanted modern” (p. 5-6), Deeb

illustrates the inextricability of formulations of spiritual and material progress and of religion and politics in their practices of piety.

Although Mahmood's (2005) analysis of the piety movement in Egypt sheds light on the inadequacies of liberal conceptions of subject formation and desire/agency, there appears to be a slippage between critiquing the inadequacy of liberal political theory to deeming liberalism irrelevant in the discourse of the piety movement. It would be integral to distinguish between, for instance, individualism as an ethical value in a particular manifestation of piety and liberal individualistic understandings of practices of piety. For example, in the interviews I conducted for this dissertation, it was often made explicit that the authority of a particular "Islamic norm" was formed through its commensurability with liberal notions of modernity, rationality, and progress. Collapsing liberal secular epistemology with liberal values also precludes the possibility of a nuanced understanding the complex relationships between liberalism and forms of "systematicity" or with the "historicity" of piety (Asad 1993; Birla 2010; Scott 2013).

As I explain further in chapter five, my respondents' trajectories of pious subject formation were constituted through a particular mapping of tradition and modernity, mind and body, and self and other that resonate with liberalism in significant ways. More specifically, I argue that their mobilization of a discourse of rationality produced forms of categorizing and othering the irrational that are complicit with liberal structures of inclusion and exclusion that bestow franchise and freedoms based on the pre-requisite of individual autonomy and rationality. Many of the women I met at Al-Huda and the Jamaat made an explicit delineation of good and bad Muslims based on the possession of rationality, and relatedly, on the possession of literacy skills, which, in turn, produced a

developmentalist politics of intervention in the practice of Islam amongst the illiterate. Thus, while liberal secular epistemologies may be inadequate frameworks for grasping the processes of pious subject formation of the women I met, this does not mean these women are outside of liberalism or that liberalism is irrelevant to their social imaginaries. Rather, the significance of liberalism for the women I conducted research with is evident if liberalism is understood as part of an “enchanted modern” (Deeb, 2006) – as a discourse of inclusion, exclusion, and intervention that is not entirely separate from the spiritual but also not entirely encompassing of it either.

In some ways, Mahmood (2005) ends up reproducing the containment of the spiritual even as she works to dislodge it from liberal secular epistemologies. That is to say, the power and agency of “local” practices and discourses is confined or made invisible by conceptualizing them as isolated, disconnected, pure/authentic and disengaged from, or uninterested in, matters outside of the local space. As Asad (1993) argues, an analysis of authorizing discourses is instrumental to understanding how these economies of desire and modes of subject formation are produced, secured, and lived. Accordingly, in this dissertation, I intend to broaden an understanding of the politics of piety by taking the spiritual as epistemological and also by explicating how the women I spoke with inhabit matrices of multiple norms and, moreover, how social hierarchies and power relations author and authorize their discourses of piety.

## **Conclusion**

To take the sacred seriously means not only understanding the spiritual as epistemological, but also to reconsider the categories of analysis mobilized in producing

knowledge about Muslim women. In this chapter, I have suggested that engaging in decolonizing categories of analysis such as 'nation', 'religion', 'Islam', 'feminism', 'women' and 'agency' is an important step towards de-centering secular epistemologies. However, processes of discursive decolonization must also include an interrogation of the ways in which analysis of Muslim women is often limited to these categories. Moreover, to understand the spiritual as epistemological poses the risk of privileging the spiritual in ways that might reproduce the distinction between the secular and religious. What 'archives of secularism' continue to haunt our processes of knowledge production? It is important to continuously interrogate what moments, relationships and practices are noted as spiritual epistemologies. This not only means to interrogate what we read as spiritual and why, but also what we do not read as spiritual.



## Chapter 3: Heteropatriarchal Religio-Nationalism, Gender, and Islam

Taking up the spiritual as epistemological is particularly poignant for an analysis of gender and Islam in the context of 'Pakistan' where relationships between women and Islam are often rendered in terms of the relationship between women and the religio-nationalist state. While the discourses of piety espoused by the women I met are in conversation with the state, – at times inadvertently so – they are not contained by the spatiality of the religio-nationalist state. Recall, how some of my respondents described piety in terms that emphasized its ubiquity – 'everyday', 'everywhere', 'everything', 'always' in the previous chapter. The ways in which the divine and the quotidian are imbricated (Alexander, 2006, p. 293) in their processes of pious subject formation presents an opportunity to interrogate and explicate a robust and historicized understanding of the spatiality of piety that is at once entangled with the spatiality of the nation-state but not contained by it.

The Pakistani state's multifaceted attempts to establish a basis of unity for the diverse population of Pakistan implicate gender in constructions of a monolithic Islamic identity. These constructions privilege and secure the Sunni<sup>51</sup> Muslim male as the

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<sup>51</sup> Sunni refers to those Muslims who believe that Abu Bakr, the Prophet Mohammed's father-in-law succeeded the Prophet after his death as the first Caliph. The majority of Pakistanis identify as Sunni. Minority non-Muslim religious populations such as Hindu and Christian are categorically marginalized or demonized in nationalist discourse. Other Islamic identities such as Shia, Ismaili, and Ahmadi do not enjoy the same normative status as Sunnis. According to the 1998 Pakistan census, Ahmadis comprise 2.2% of the population. Shias, including Ismaili, form a significant minority. Interestingly, the 1998 census does not report population statistics broken down by Shias and Sunnis, collapsing them under the category "Muslim" ("Population by Religion," 1998). Many of these minority communities face violent forms of marginalization, which are at times sanctioned by the state. See, for example, the legislative history of categorizing Ahmadis as non-Muslims (Jalal, 2000; Toor, 2011c). Also see the state's inaction in face of targeted attacks against the Shia Hazara community in Balochistan ("I am Hazara," 2012). In addition, the Council of Islamic Ideology in the Pakistani government draws exclusively on Sunni Islamic thought. Also see the explicit privileging of Sunni Islam in the national curriculum (Ali, 2008).

normative citizen-subject of Pakistan through religio-nationalist discursive and legislative tactics. Arguably, the contours of this normative citizen-subject were most acutely sharpened during Zia-ul-Haq's military dictatorship that ruled Pakistan for eleven years under martial law from 1977-1988. The Zia-ul-Haq regime's Islamization program, *Nizam-i-Mustafa* (governance of the Prophet), promulgated a multi-sited "Sunnification" (Toor, 2011c, p. 160) of Islam in Pakistan through introducing new legislation, altering juridical structures, and conducting media and grassroots campaigns to strengthen and spread this version of Sunni Islam (Toor, 2011c). This Islamization program was produced through the Zia regime's close ties with the Jamaat-e-Islami, drawing on the teachings of Maulana Maududi (Jalal, 1995b; Toor, 2011c). These programs were particularly detrimental to women and sexual and religious minorities because of legal mechanisms, such as the Hudood Ordinances and the Blasphemy Law, that aimed to regulate women's bodies and silence or eliminate religious pluralism in Pakistan.

Many women's organizations, and particularly those that came together under the umbrella of the Women's Action Forum (WAF) in 1981, fashioned a form of 'Islamic feminism' that employed universal human rights discourse to resist these religio-nationalist developments at the level of the state. The WAF mobilized an articulation of a Muslim feminist subject in order to contest the Pakistani state's construction of the religio-nationalist citizen-subject and to recast Islam as compatible with their feminist ideals. Their struggles in face of often violent and drastic state measures have been formative for academic scholarship that analyze the relationships between Pakistani women, Islam, and

the state.<sup>52</sup> Because of these historical political imbrications of Islam and the Pakistani state, this scholarship focuses on how the religio-nationalist state and human rights discourse mediate the relationship between Pakistani women and Islam.

In this chapter, I elaborate on the ways in which the Pakistani state articulates and mobilizes the relationship between women and Islam, and how women's rights organizations formulate their resistance to these articulations through universal human rights discourse. I analyze their competing mobilizations of the gendered Pakistani citizen-subject and the secularized Muslim feminist subject in order to elucidate the epistemological foreclosures these discourses employ and reproduce. I argue that these articulations of the relationship between women and Islam through the frameworks of the nation-state and universal human rights discourse remain limited to what I theorized as secular epistemologies in the previous chapter. That is, in privileging how religion is rendered through the secular time-space of the nation-state or of universal human rights in reading women's relationships with Islam, the sacred is amiss.

The interplay of these competing narratives produces an antagonistic relationship between women's rights organizations and women's piety groups such as Al-Huda and the Jamaat. While the gendered relationships propagated through the Islamic discourse of the women I interviewed ostensibly serve the interests of nationalist constructions of the gendered citizen-subject, the ways in which these women articulate and inhabit their

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<sup>52</sup> State measures against these women's organizations included, for example, police forces baton charging and arresting women who were protesting the Zia-ul-Haq regime's Islamization program (Toor, 2014). Some women's activists/advocates have also been individually targeted in homicidal attacks (Toor, 2011c). The scholarship analyzing these developments includes works authored by women associated with the WAF as well as other Pakistani scholars. See, for example, Mumtaz and Shaeed (1988), N. S. Khan (2004), S. Khan (2006), Rouse (2004), Toor (2011a, 2011c, 2014), Jamal (2005, 2006), and Saigol (2000).

understanding of pious gender roles does not lend itself to a seamless consolidation of the Pakistani nation-state (see chapter four). At the same time, these women do not mobilize universal human rights discourse to articulate their relationships with Islam, which are in many ways detractions from religio-nationalist Islam. I explore the competing narratives of relationships between women and Islam in Pakistani religio-nationalist and women's rights discourse and how their underpinning discursive structures elide and/or obstruct an understanding of the Islamic praxis of the women I conducted research with.

### **Heteropatriarchal Religio-Nationalism**

To some extent, the deep suspicions of women who participate in Al-Huda and the Jamaat festering amongst women's rights organizations are the result of these organization's struggles against the ideological power of the heteropatriarchal religio-nationalist state. Heteropatriarchy refers to the "twin processes of heterosexualization and patriarchy" that structure the state's regulation of women's bodies and sexualities (Alexander, 1997, p. 65). This process "privileges men's experiences, definitions, and perceptions of sexuality" and renders expressions of heterosexual women's, lesbian, and transgender sexual desires as hypersexual or deviant (Kempadoo, 2004, p. 9). I use the term heteropatriarchal religio-nationalism with reference to the Pakistani state in order to foreground the scripts of subject formation produced through interconnected structures of heteronormativity, patriarchy, and religion-based nationalism that privilege the heterosexual, Sunni Muslim male as the normative citizen-subject.

The Hudood Ordinances and the Pakistani state's discursive construction of the normative citizen-subject exemplify how the Pakistani state constructs and mobilizes the

relationship between women and Islam as part of its heteropatriarchal nationalist project. The dubious interstices of religion and state-led moral regulation of women in Pakistan have been explored at length in feminist scholarship on the Hudood Ordinances that explicitly regulated women's bodies, sexuality, and mobility through juridical structures. To briefly provide some context, the Hudood Ordinances were a set of 'Islamic' laws promulgated in 1979 during the rule of Zia-ul-Haq's military dictatorship. They aimed to define the role of women in Islamic society through the tenets of *chadar aur chardiwari* (veil and four walls) as part of the Zia-ul-Haq regime's plans to implement *Nizam-i-Mustafa*. That is, envisioning a nation where the ideal Muslim woman would be veiled and would be confined within the four walls of the home, the Zia-ul-Haq regime sought to produce this woman and penalize those who did not adhere to this ideal through a number of laws and modes of enforcement. These laws included the Zina Ordinance, which explicitly sought to regulate sexual activity by defining the parameters of "legal" sex acts. This included defining rape, pre-marital sex, and extra-marital sex as "illicit sex" and making them crimes against the state. More significantly, the Zina Ordinance opened up a serious legal quagmire through its law of evidence where the testimony of four male Muslim witnesses was required to bring forward accusations of rape. In practice what this meant was that women who reported incidents of rape and could not meet the said witness requirements, which were impossible to meet in any case, would in turn be incarcerated and punished for engaging in pre or extra-marital sex (S. Khan, 2006; Toor, 2011b).

In her ethnographic account of women incarcerated under the Zina Ordinances, Shahnaz Khan (2006) suggests that these laws have had an uneven impact on Pakistanis based on class and gender. While women have borne the brunt of the impact of the Zina

Ordinance, she argues that impoverished and illiterate women have been more vulnerable and faced harsher penalties. This is in part due to a lack of basic literacy skills and access to financial and socio-political resources required to navigate the legal system. As Khan (2006) further suggests, neoliberal economic hardships generated in Pakistan through structural adjustment programs have been a key factor in the rise of violence against women. As such, these repercussions of the Hudood Ordinances cannot be equated with the problems of Islam, so to speak, rather they must be understood within a broader context of neoliberalization and development. While impoverished communities experienced these laws in more acute and detrimental ways, literate middle and upper class women were not immune to the imposition of these laws. As Toor (2014) explains “ideas/discourses/projects of ‘respectability’ specifically or ‘propriety’ in general, mediate the social production of class and gender” (p. 130). Matters of property and class and/or caste status underpin some of the most infamous examples of the regulation of middle and upper class women’s sexuality through the Hudood Ordinances (Toor, 2011c).<sup>53</sup>

It is important to note, as Shahnaz Rouse (2004) argues, that these legislative tactics were not an aberration resulting solely from the historical trajectory of Pakistani politics. Rather, she suggests that “the process that culminated in the changes brought about by Zia-ul-Haq’s regime can only be understood if their antecedents are traced back to early post-

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<sup>53</sup> See Toor’s discussion on the cases of Veena Hayat, Samia Sarwar, and Saima Waheed. Caste hierarchies tend to be obfuscated in nationalist discourses and academic analysis of Pakistan. This is in part symptomatic of nationalist investments in distancing from Hindu/India. Although caste is an operative category for many communities, there is little by way of academic analysis of caste in nationalist or human rights discourse. Caste not only continues to be covered over, but the analytical tools for conducting an analysis of caste are few and far between. When I asked women I interviewed about caste in Pakistan or about how they understood caste, the conversation was invariably diverted to India, Hinduism or the early days of independence – suggesting that in the contemporary moment caste was not a factor for Pakistani Muslims. For a critical analysis of caste dynamics in Pakistan see *Caste in Pakistan: The Elephant in the Room* by Shahbano Aliani (2006).

independence tendencies” (Rouse, 2004, p. 93). Pointing to the example of Ayub Khan’s 1961 Family Laws Ordinance, Rouse argues that state encroachment into the private realm was occurring through legal mechanisms prior to the Zia-ul-Haq dictatorship. She further suggests that colonial rule had a transformative impact on norms of gender and sexuality through legal, family, market and educational institutions that “served to maintain and reinforce the privilege of men over women” and that continue to influence Pakistani state institutions to date (Rouse, 2004, p. 7). Toor (2011a) also argues for the importance of understanding “colonial antecedents” to the law in postcolonial states like Pakistan, where the law is embedded in colonial histories of codifying and managing the Indian population (para. 35).<sup>54</sup> The imbrications of religion, law, and the regulation of women are thus not an example of “Islamic exceptionalism” – what Toor (2011a) defines as a contemporary form of Orientalism that obscures an understanding of the interconnected ways in which patriarchy operates between and across different sites, reducing it to an exceptional problem of Islam (para. 45). Furthermore, the continuity of imperial relations of power in post-independence geo-politics, such as Pakistan’s pivotal role in the Cold War as an ally of the United States of America, is a key factor in the development of the actions of the Zia-ul-Haq regime (Toor, 2011c). The Hudood Ordinances must thus be read contextually within transnational historical continuums of gendered discrimination and as articulated within the context of imperial geo-politics and not as an example of Islamic exceptionalism.

The broader nationalist imaginary underpinning the promulgation of the Hudood Ordinances implicates processes of constructing and producing a normative citizen-subject

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<sup>54</sup> More specifically, Toor (2011a) refers to how colonial “Family Laws” in India formulated the family in terms of religion – Muslim Family Laws, Hindu Family Laws, Christian Family Laws (para. 35).

as a means to manage difference in a nation-state where the fragile basis of unity is persistently questioned and threatened through the varied allegiances of racialized and marginalized populations (Rouse, 2004). In the dominant discourse perpetuated by the Pakistani state apparatuses, Islam functions as a vehicle for facilitating identification with and legitimization of heteropatriarchal religio-nationalism and its corresponding production of citizen-subjects. The codification of religion that is borne out of dominant nationalist imaginaries is particularly significant because it incorporates practices of piety into notions of ideal, post-colonial citizen-subjects, which are invariably gendered. That is to say, the coalescing of gender, nationalism and religion brings practices of piety into the purview of nationalist projects as a site of regulation and subordination of women.

### **Gender and Nation**

Pakistani religio-nationalist iterations of the relationship between gender and the nation reproduce the imperatives of secularism in the modern nation-state discussed in chapter two. Although the explicit intersections of religion and nationalism in the case of Pakistan have led to marginalization in international discourses of the modern nation-state, the ways in which gendered tropes operate in articulations of Pakistani religio-nationalism reproduce the secular temporality of the nation-state. This is particularly evident in how gender is mobilized in resolving the tension between authenticity and progress in the nation-state.

Prominent scholars of post/anti-colonial nationalism such as Lila Abu-Lughod (1998), Partha Chatterjee (1993), Deniz Kandiyoti (1991), Anne McClintock (1993; 1995), Radhika Mohanram (1999), and Nira Yuval-Davis (1997) critique nationalist configurations



of gender roles and domestic space for the various ways in which the temporal-spatial construction of nationhood is gendered. As these scholars of anti-colonial nationalisms have shown, gendered significations underpinning nationalist discourse instrumentalize filial affectations to construct non-filial relations as familiar, intelligible, natural, and desirable. In this way, affiliation with the nation represents both a continuity and a break from the family in the sense that the nation is simultaneously constructed as an extension of the family as well as a progression away from the centrality of the family in informing social and political life. McClintock (1993) argues that the trope of the 'family' is key to constructing the historical "organic continuity" (p. 63) of the nation as emerging from and reflecting the family while capitalizing on its putative status as natural and universal or, as she puts it, "nations are symbolically figured as domestic genealogies" (p. 65). In other words, the trope of the family furnishes nationalist discourse with an ontological tenor. This is especially useful for managing the central challenge in nationalism of mitigating the threat posed by social difference to nationalist claims/promises of unity and belonging. Refracted through the trope of the family, hierarchies based on social difference are justified and legitimized through the naturalization of familial hierarchies – husband, wife, child (McClintock, 1995). Accordingly, the gendered hierarchy of the family mobilized in Pakistani religio-nationalist discourse serves to establish differentiated relationships to the nation for those rendered as subordinate members of the patriarchal family (wife, children).

This conceptualization of difference is also instrumental in resolving the temporal tension in nationalism "between nostalgia for the past, and the impatient, progressive sloughing off of the past" where women represent "the living archive of the national

archaic” and evidence of authenticity while men are the agents of progress (McClintock 1993, p. 67). In an effort to resolve this tension, nationalist struggles against colonialism were also “cultural or discursive project[s] in which ideals of womanhood and notions of the modern were key elements” (Abu-Lughod, 1998, p. 17). Anti-colonial discourses of Indian nationalist movements, for instance, established the legitimacy of their claims to sovereignty by simultaneously asserting similarity with British colonizers in the material realm and difference from the colonizers in the cultural or spiritual realm (Chatterjee, 1993). Chatterjee (1993) argues that the discursive techniques of Indian anti-colonial nationalist movements speaks to how the construction of such an oppositional identity – involving claims of authenticity and superiority in the cultural or spiritual realm – is a powerful but constructed trope that implicates women as markers of authenticity.

The link between gender and nation is not limited to symbolic systems. Women are also implicated in biologically and culturally reproducing the nation (Yuval-Davis, 1997). In addition, the symbolic currency conferred upon women’s bodies is inextricable from their biological and cultural reproductive roles. In this sense, ideas of the nation are produced and maintained through instrumentalizing women’s bodies as reproducers of citizens, disseminators and repositories of culture, and symbols of national identity (Yuval-Davis, 1997). The social control of women thus becomes central to nationalist projects because of the implications for biological and cultural reproduction of the nation-state and because of the temporal reconciliation that the woman-as-symbol affords. The Hudood Ordinances discussed earlier exemplify how these gendered mechanisms of social control are entangled in Pakistani religio-nationalist claims to Islam as a marker of a distinct and authentic national identity. This control of women in turn establishes the legitimacy of the

sovereign nation as one that is rooted in authenticity and is at the same time invested in and capable of modernity – time is thus domesticated (McClintock, 1993).

This utilization of women as symbols and reproducers of the nation constructs uneven gendered relationships to the nation. As Radhika Mohanram (1999) suggests, women “are” the nation while men “have” the nation. That is, “within discourses of the nation, the woman as agent virtually disappears except insofar as she upholds the nation” (Mohanram, 1999, p. 58). While women are given a central reproductive role in the nation, they are located as a “woman within the nation” (Mohanram, 1999, p. 60) and within the family, which is an extension of the postcolonial state. This gendered bifurcation of relationships to the nation, Mohanram (1999) argues, stems from the need for an “idealized” (p. 58) body in nationalist discourse – and this idealized body is always gendered.

The symbolic role of idealized women’s bodies is not only tied to anti-colonial nationalist distancing from the colonial West, but are also central to complicated entanglements with the West (Abu-Lughod, 1998, p. 18). In postcolonial state-building processes women are not only used as markers of ‘authenticity’ but they are also used “to symbolize the aspirations of secularist elite” (Kandiyoti, 1991, p. 3) for progress. Though pulled in different directions at different moments in nationalist processes, the idealized woman’s body continues to serve as a “potent symbol” (Abu-Lughod, 1998, p. 4) of national identity. Thus, whether signifying a continuity of authenticity or a departure from it in the name of progress and modernity, the instrumentalization of women as signifiers and corresponding forms of social regulation are derived from the discursive naturalization of their subordination through nationalist discourse.

The aforementioned theoretical discussion is central to my argument regarding how we understand women's practices of piety in the context of heteropatriarchal religio-nationalist discourse. Women's everyday practices of piety in Pakistan, where Islam is imagined as the basis of unity for the nation, acquire political significance in terms of the extent to which they affirm, inhabit, or subvert the nationalist imaginary on multiple fronts – biological, cultural, symbolic. The importance of delineating domestic space from public space; women's roles as reproducers of the nation; and the symbolic work of women's bodies is evident in the gendered ways in which Pakistani national identity is conjured and sustained as an Islamic identity. Toor (2011a) characterizes the ways in which Islam is mobilized in relation to women by the Pakistani state and its cognates as "patriarchal opportunism" where Islam becomes a readily available part of an "ideological toolbox" used to subjugate and regulate women in the service of particular classed, state, and/or imperial projects (para. 22). She argues that "Islam is invoked selectively" and that "sometimes the rights granted to women under Islamic law become inconvenient for the purposes of patriarchal control" (Toor, 2011a, para. 22). As such, collapsing women's experiences of oppression as their experience with Islam misses the role of the nation-state and its selective instrumentalization of Islam. Furthermore, Toor (2011a) suggests that these mobilizations are not only varied and shifting in Pakistan, but they are also entangled with imperial projects and discourses of terrorism. The gendering of the normative Muslim citizen-subject of Pakistan is thus constituted through a complex discursive field that mobilizes Islam selectively and purposefully.

## **Religio-Nationalist Curricula: Constructing the Citizen-Subject**

Studies of the Pakistani state's mandated nationalist curricula exemplify how the aforementioned constructions of women's roles in the nation centres on the Sunni Muslim male as the normative citizen-subject of Pakistan and relegates women to the role of reproducing the nation to consolidate a singular national identity. Mobilized as an ideological apparatus of nation-building, the Pakistan Studies curriculum in particular is carefully developed and closely guarded by the state and has been stubbornly resilient in face of criticisms, contradicting historical evidence, and public dissent (Ali, 2008; Aziz, 1998; Jalal, 1995a; Saigol, 1994, 2000). This is in part because the Pakistani state has worked hard to cultivate a sense of nationalism and belonging amongst its population since the 1947 partition of India through a deliberate process of nationalizing the past and perpetuating the idea that (Sunni) Islam was the basis of the nation-state (Ali 2008; Pandey 2001; Jalal, 1995). The extent of such manipulations of history led Hamza Alavi (2002) to declare "today we are separated from our past by half a century of lies" (p. 5120). Pakistan Studies was made a mandatory secondary school subject in 1971 by Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's government in face of the fragmentation of the nation-state with the independence of Bangladesh. While the content of Pakistan Studies has shifted in line with the interests of the political party or dictator in power, the emphasis on constructing and producing a basis of unity and an ideal citizen-subject has persisted since its inception. In what follows, I examine parts of the English language Pakistan Studies curriculum as an articulation of state-led heteropatriarchal religio-nationalism in order to elucidate how Islam and gender come to be entangled in the nationalist project.

Commonly referred to as 'Pak Studies' in popular parlance, which aptly translates to 'pure studies', the Pakistan Studies program is notorious for its revisionist history and patriotic propaganda that constructs a purified nationalist narrative of the creation of Pakistan that sidelines the socio-political circumstances and experiences of partition by centralizing the achievement of independence for Muslims. The "ideology of Pakistan" in various Pak Studies texts, for instance, is represented as a monolithic spirit that has been around for centuries and fulfilled its destiny in the independence struggle of pious leaders, such as Quaid-i-Azam (Mohammad Ali Jinnah) and Allama Iqbal, to save Indian Muslims from socio-economic distress and establish Pakistan in 1947 ("National," 2006; Saigol, 1994). As Ayesha Jalal (1995), argues, such representations of the founding leaders of Pakistan are historically inaccurate. For example, she explicates the contradictions between Jinnah's role and representations of him in the making and remembering of partition. Jalal (1995) argues that Jinnah and the Muslim League were not interested in securing a territorially defined separate Islamic state, rather, their assertion of the "two-nation theory" imagined the co-existence of two nations, Hindustan and Pakistan, within India where both nations would be afforded equal status and representation in the workings of the government. Jalal and others argue that this vision of Pakistan was invoked in order to protect minority rights within the state of India, not to demand a separate Pakistani state. The "aestheticizing impulse" (Pandey, 2001, p. 4) in the Pak Studies curriculum leads to the omission of this contradiction between the expressed goals of the Muslim League and the outcomes of 1947. Instead, Pak Studies textbooks shift the focus away from the political negotiations leading up to 1947 as the originary moments of Pakistan and locate the origins of the 'ideology of Pakistan' in the ancient past, pre-existing

the Muslim League (Jalal 1995). The leaders of the Muslim League then are characterized as an almost prophetic manifestation of the historic force of the 'ideology of Pakistan'.

The emphasis on 'ideology' in the national curriculum is evidence of prioritizing the need to depict Muslim unity as a historic feature of the subcontinent through a deliberate mystification and mythologization of the origins of 'Pakistan', which would otherwise be revealed as a far more tenuous and fragile foundation for the nation-state. Sugata Bose and Ayesha Jalal (1997) argue against official nationalist narratives that prefigure an all-India Muslim unity prior to the creation of Pakistan, however, they also argue against a revisionist history that narrates the social identity of 'Indian Muslims' as wholly shaped by colonialism. That is to say, the partition of India was not based on a historically unified Muslim community, nor was it solely the result of colonial constructions of social identities (through, for example, separate electorates). Ultimately, for Bose and Jalal, the partition was the result of a series of developments at the political centre where the interests of the Indian National Congress (INC) in particular prevailed and the INC's actions determined the outcome of 1947. Bose and Jalal's (1997) thesis stands in stark contrast to the nationalist narratives of both India and Pakistan: In India, the official history of partition represents Jinnah as the "destroyer of Bharatmata" (p. 196) and in Pakistan, partition is remembered as the realization of the 'ideology of Pakistan' through an ongoing struggle for an Islamic state led by Jinnah. Neither of these official narratives leaves any room for imagining the INC as the primary agent behind partition and Jinnah its main opponent, as Bose and Jalal contend. Additional evidence of the wildly inaccurate national history in Pakistan Studies textbooks has been pointed out in several other academic, journalistic, and non-governmental publications as well (Aziz, 1998; Jalal, 1995; Saigol, 2014, 1994).

Pakistan Studies textbooks are thus rife with blatant efforts to consolidate and homogenize national identity and build a sense of civic duty and patriotism often articulated as synonymous with Sunni Islam and antithetical to India (read: Hindu).

The ideology of Pakistan is further strengthened by invoking scripture to establish the basis of national unity. The mobilization of Quranic verses to establish the principle of fraternity in Pakistan Studies textbooks is indicative of how the Pakistani state attempts to trump other allegiances by calling on all Muslim men to identify as Muslim brothers. The effacement of difference and the construction of national unity in nationalist educational materials occurs through an appeal to a Muslim “brotherhood” or “fraternity”. As an English-language Pakistan Studies textbook published in 2004 states:

In the words of the Holy Qur’an ‘All the believers are brothers to each other’. The principle of fraternity is an important aspect of Islamic Society. As brothers, they share the problems of each other, and their happiness also. The feelings of brotherhood promote affection, mutual cooperation, selfless service and sacrifice. In this way, the society becomes peaceful and a place of comfort for all. (*Pakistan Studies*, 2004, p. 9)

The above quotation illustrates how anxieties about the fragmentation of the nation are managed by invoking a particular translation and interpretation of Quranic scripture to appeal to the commonality of being Muslim men. Indeed, the textbook is largely addressed to a male Muslim audience with incessant references to the need to unite and behave like brothers. Furthermore, the notion that to be part of an ‘Islamic society’ requires one to identify with the fraternity implies that those who do not accord primacy to their Muslim identity over other forms of identification cannot be in an Islamic society, and, by extension, the nation. As this excerpt illustrates, articulations of nationalist identity in the state curriculum mobilize gender in strategic ways as a pivotal site for establishing a basis of unity, which is tied to the denial of the multiplicity of nations and identities within



Pakistan's geographic borders as well as a denial of how some of these identities are not contained by national boundaries (Jalal, 1995a; Saigol, 2000).

Women and religious and ethnic minorities appear to be excluded as stakeholders in the nationalist project, however, they are made to enter the nationalist narrative in strategic and instrumental ways. As Rouse (2004) suggests, this construction of national identity centred on the Sunni Muslim male also constructs the idealized woman who complies with these gender roles and, by extension, constructs those who do not as "woman as other" (p. 101) and as a threat to the nation. In a section of the textbook that describes the central tenets of Pakistani national culture, the status of men and women is articulated as follows:

Male member has occupied a unique status in Pakistani culture. He is the head of the family. He is the dominant member. But a woman is also considered an important part of the family who governs and manages all family affairs within the four walls. Household keeping and upbringing of children is entrusted to her in a family. She has the right to education, right to property and right to business in accordance with the principles of Islam. The rights and duties of men and women are determined in light of the teachings of Islam. These principles are equally followed in all the four provinces of Pakistan and, hence, form common cultural heritage of Pakistan. (*Pakistan Studies*, 2004, p. 134)

What is striking about this passage is the sweeping proclamation that these principles are equally followed in all the four provinces of Pakistan. That is, the imagined prevalence of a monolithically conceived patriarchal household is presented as a testament to the existence of a united national Islamic culture. That these gender roles are claimed to be "in accordance with the principles of Islam" further reiterates the Pakistani state's investment in instrumentalizing Islam to invent a uniting national identity. The reference to the four provinces especially acquires particular significance in a context where ethnic and linguistic differences are organized around provincial borders. Significantly, the Federally

Administered Tribal Areas, Gilgit-Baltistan, and the disputed territories of Azad Jammu and Kashmir are absent altogether from this iteration of the nation. Much is at stake in the codification of patriarchal gender roles for the construction and maintenance of a uniting national culture. Patriarchy is thus mobilized in the national curriculum as a panacea for the palpable insecurities about the potential fragmentation of the nation. This albeit fragile codification of a uniting national identity in androcentric terms works in tandem with the relegation of women to the private sphere and to domestic labour.

The centrality of the male Sunni Muslim in nationalist conceptualizations of the pious Pakistani citizen-subject is further solidified through state discourses that claim the Prophet as a male role model for Muslim men to emulate. When it comes to models of piety for women in the nation, Pakistani state figures put forward female Islamic figures such as Khadija, Ayesha<sup>55</sup> and Fatima. The notable emphasis in public and National Assembly speeches by Pakistani state actors on the Prophet Mohammed's daughter, Fatima, as a role model for women speaks to how the state imagines the role of women in the nation. Fatima serves as a perfect role model because she was not only the daughter of the Prophet, but also the wife of the Prophet's closest living male relative and a major Islamic figure, Ali; the mother of the two prominent Islamic figures, Hassan and Hussain; and a legendary caretaker of soldiers on the battlefield. Fatima is also characterized as living her life with "simplicity, patience, tolerance, nobility, and piety", as noted in a speech by Prime Minister Nawaz Sherif ("Nawaz," 1991). During her time as Prime Minister, Benazir Bhutto

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<sup>55</sup> Khadija was Prophet Mohammed's first wife who was a prominent merchant and a number of years older than the Prophet. She is believed to be the first convert to Islam. Ayesha was Prophet's second or third wife (the order is disputed) who he married when he was 53 and she was six or seven years old. She is said to be a key force in the spread of Islam and in the recording of the *hadith*.

also made similar remarks about Fatima, stating that “she had complete faith in Allah Almighty, patiently faced the hardships of life and brought up her children in an ideal manner” (“Muslim,” 1993). Such proclamations about the significance of Fatima emphasize her reproductive role within the family and call on Pakistani Muslim women to fulfill multiple domestic roles in this manner.

In addition to the significance of Fatima’s personal qualities and reproductive labour, the invocation of Fatima also places the burden of consolidating the Pakistani nation-state on women’s shoulders. This placement exemplifies the imperatives of the nation-state to strategically mobilize women in relation to symbolic, cultural, and biological reproduction. As the wife of Ali – whose followers believed in his right to succeed the Prophet and later came to be known as Shias – Fatima symbolizes the common ground for overcoming sectarianism between Shia and Sunni Muslims in Pakistan. Fatima’s reproductive labour is caught up in fantasies of an idyllic time prior to the death of the Prophet Mohammed and before the birth of a major rift in Islamic history. The figure of Fatima, thus simultaneously serves as an exemplar of domesticity and a symbol of national unity, which on the surface appears to temper the normativity of Sunni Islam in Pakistan.

As Saigol (2000) argues, such gendering of national identity has implications for the way citizenship is differentiated for men and women: “Male identity comes to be constructed in terms of his rights as an individual citizen of the state, while female identity is predicated upon her duties to the nation/state as a mother” (p. 132). As the role model of Fatima illustrates, the ideal Pakistani woman’s place in the nationalist imaginary is tied to her role and duties as a daughter, wife, and mother. The Pakistani state is thus invested in gendering citizenship in terms of “his rights” and “her duties” (Saigol, 2000, p. 129).

Even in instances where the Pakistani state extends certain rights to women – such as the right to education and the right to vote – they are construed as part of women’s reproductive duties that serve to consolidate the nation-state and protect it from divisive forces (Jalal, 1991; Rouse, 2004). For many women in Al-Huda and the Jamaat, this is an insufficient and androcentric articulation of the role of women in Islam that sidesteps Islamic duties ordained for men and the Islamic rights given to women. Religio-nationalist instantiations of heteropatriarchy through the Quran, and the expressions of Islam therefrom, find little resonance in the way my respondents conceptualize domestic relationships (see chapter four).

### **Formulating Resistance: ‘Islamic feminism’**

The Pakistani state’s heteropatriarchal religio-nationalism, and especially the Hudood Ordinances, have elicited strong reactions from Pakistani women’s rights organizations as well as international human rights organizations (such as Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, United Nations, Women Living Under Muslim Laws). The way these organizations articulate and rearticulate relationships between women and Islam centres on resisting the religio-nationalist state by mobilizing universal human rights discourse. Many prominent women’s rights groups in Pakistan articulate their resistance to the Pakistani state’s instrumentalization of Islam through a form of ‘Islamic feminism’. The main project of some women’s rights organizations is to reformulate Islam for the benefit of women by wrestling Islam away from the Pakistani state and into their conceptualization of universal human rights. Drawing on liberal, secular, universal rights-based feminist discourse, these groups strategically challenged the state by recasting

'Islam' as an inherently egalitarian religion through, for example, progressive interpretations of religious texts. However, in an attempt to liberate 'Islam' from the grips of the Pakistani state, this 'women's movement' in effect reproduced the discursive techniques of the state by promoting an alternative but still essentialized version of 'Islam'. That is to say, while the Pakistani state represented 'Islam' as inherently patriarchal, the 'women's movement' represented it as inherently egalitarian.

Many women's organizations mobilized Islam as a tool of universal rights discourse, seeing this as the most expedient and optimal way for improving the status of women in Pakistan (Jamal, 2005b; Mumtaz & Shaheed, 1988). For example, some of these groups strategically challenged the Pakistani state by recasting 'Islam' as an inherently egalitarian religion through what they claim to be progressive interpretations of religious texts. Organizations such as Shirkat Gah, Women Living Under Muslim Laws, and Aurat Foundation that are invested in the political project of universal rights-based (Western) feminism, are engaged in such reformist projects, fashioning themselves as 'Islamic feminists'. This approach has seen some success in resisting religio-nationalist state projects but it ultimately consolidates potent categories of difference within feminist praxis that secure and privilege the secular subject of modernity (Jamal, 2005a). The epistemological frameworks that structure such an approach to feminist praxis preempt a nuanced understanding of the relationship between Islam and feminism because they construct and work within an Islam-feminism spectrum: On one end, 'Islam' is understood within the parameters of secular notions of religion and its corresponding binaries, and, on the other, 'feminism' is essentialized as a 'secular' project for 'women' to acquire 'agency' in the face of 'patriarchy'. The emancipatory potential of women in Islam is thus evaluated by

how far, if at all, they are able to negotiate their way away from 'Islam' and toward 'feminism'. In what follows, I examine more closely how these categories of analysis produce analytical frameworks that constrain subjectivity within the bounds of intelligibility set up through the secular feminist subject as an authorial referent. That is, I analyze how 'Islamic feminism' is implicated in processes of securing the normative secular subject of modernity.

A brief recounting of the broader debate on 'Islamic feminism' may be useful here to illustrate what secular epistemologies look like and how they operate in terms of producing an understanding of women's relationships to Islam. I argue that within this debate, 'Islamic feminism' is identified and homogenized as women engaged in reclaiming 'Islam' for women primarily through gender-progressive (re)interpretations of scripture. Feminist scholarship assessing the possibilities and limitations of 'Islamic feminism' often reduce 'Islam' to scripture and understand it as inescapably patriarchal and, in turn, define 'feminism' as a secular project involving 'women' having 'agency' in face of 'patriarchy'. Located somewhere in between these two endpoints, 'Islamic feminism' is understood as either an oxymoron or a compromised feminism that is the best that can be hoped for in Islamic societies. I suggest that tracing how these categories of analysis are mobilized in discussions about 'Islamic feminism' reveals that neither of these interpretations challenge the dominance of secular epistemological frameworks that construct the diametric opposition of 'Islam' and 'feminism' and, moreover, reiterate them as fixed categories of analysis.

One of the central concerns in this debate is the possibility of Islamic feminism to satisfactorily resolve the issue of the authority given to men over women in the Quran,

which I elaborate on at length in chapter four in relation to how the women I interviewed understand and inhabit the Quranic concept of *qawwam*. Here, I provide some examples of how Quranic injunctions that ostensibly affirm male authority have been subjected to *ijtihad*<sup>56</sup> by Islamic feminists, such as Asma Barlas (2009), Riffat Hassan (1996; 2001), Fatima Mernissi (1991), and Amina Wadud (2006), who are interested in developing “liberation theology”, “feminist theology” or “gender progressive” interpretations of the Quran. For these Islamic feminists, gendered hierarchies justified through Islam are the result of male monopolization of interpretive practices of Islamic texts. Thus, displacement of androcentric interpretations and reclamation of “egalitarian” aspects of the Quran through gender inclusive *ijtihad* by women are key processes in their reformist projects. The women I met categorically disagreed with such contemporary practices of *ijtihad* and instead fashioned themselves as literalists.

It is important to note that while the aforementioned ‘Islamic feminists’ employ similar approaches, their engagements are grounded in specific political projects and social contexts. I focus here on how they grapple with the pervasiveness of androcentric interpretations of Islamic texts as what they perceive to be a primary source of Muslim women’s oppression in order to tease out aspects of their practices that are homogenized and decontextualized in academic debates. These scholars first turn to the Quran to establish women’s authority and duty to engage in *ijtihad*. Amina Wadud (2006), for example, conceptualizes this “struggle to establish gender justice in Muslim thought and

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<sup>56</sup> *Ijtihad* is an Islamic term referring to independent reasoning or original interpretation of the Quran. In some strands of Islam this practice is reserved for those deemed to be authoritative “Islamic scholars” and is only available to them for selective circumstances. In other strands, this practice is available to everyone and can be used to adapt Islam to any social environment. Others, such as the women I conducted research with, believe this practice is no longer required and that the gates of *ijtihad* are closed.

praxis” as “gender *jihad*” (p. 10). Buttressed by her explication of “egalitarian principles” in Islamic scripture, she not only establishes gender inclusive readings of the Quran by women as a legitimate practice, but she also establishes it as an Islamic duty enshrined in the central tenets of Islam (Wadud, 2006, p. 2). In endorsing gender-inclusive *ijtihad* as an Islamic practice and finding legitimacy for it in Islamic principles, Wadud highlights the built-in mechanisms for challenging dominant interpretations and, by extension, male superiority in Islam. In addition, Wadud diligently points out faulty translations and misinterpretations of key words and phrases in the Quran that would drastically change the implications of the text for women. For instance, she refers to the dominant association of “Islam” with “submission” and suggests that the correct translation is “engaged surrender” (Wadud, 2006, p. 23). According to Wadud, the distinction between the two has vast implications for an Islamic conception of agency because “submission” conveys a sense of coercion while “surrender” connotes voluntary choice. Thus, she argues that read in the context of “male interpretive privilege” (Wadud, 2006, p. 22), the equation of Islam with submission establishes a foundational myth that implicitly condones coercion and subordination in social relations more broadly and forms the basis for interpretations that uphold the subjugation of women.

Like Wadud, Riffat Hassan (2001) locates the subordinated status of women in (mis)interpretations of the Quran by male Islamic scholars – interpretations that she argues become particularly insidious as they acquire the status of “self-evident truths”, or common sense, in Muslim societies (p. 59). For her, the purpose of an ‘Islamic feminism’ is to engage in theological assessment of the credibility of dominant self-evident truths that were derived from the Quran and mobilized to sanction women’s inferior status. Hassan’s



approach to *ijtihad* is to read the oft-quoted passages of the Quran that ostensibly create a gendered hierarchy against the broader egalitarian messages of the Quran. She argues that because Islam “rejects the idea of there being any intermediary between a believer and God,” (Hassan, 1995, p. 33) there is no room for the possibility of men to occupy a superior status that would mediate women’s relationship to Allah. Asma Barlas (2009) adds the question of interpretive methods to trace the genealogy of conceptualizations of women’s inferiority in Islam. She argues that conservative readings of the Quran employ textual strategies that are not attentive to the Quran as a “complex hermeneutic totality” or as “historically situated” (Barlas, 2009, p. 8). That is, as Barlas contends, misreadings of the Quran emerge out of techniques that take up the Quran as a linear text without considering its intra-textual connections and explications. This leads to isolating verses and reading them outside of thematic and structural context, which, in turn, results in a cherry-picked compilation of Quranic verses to support “patriarchal exegesis” (Barlas, 2009, p. 9). Coupled with the lack of historical context, these “conservative” and “patriarchal” readings, according to Barlas, lack rigor and elide an understanding of the deeper significance of Islamic revelation.

In her canonical works on women and Islam, Fatima Mernissi (1987, 1991, 1996) traces what she perceives as the subjugated status of women in Islam to historical moments where particular gender ideologies influenced Islamic exegesis. She argues that the universalization of this interpretation obscures the contingency of the context in which it was produced, which, in turn, speciously presents the inferior status of women as intrinsic to Islam. Mernissi (1991) methodically reviews parts of the *hadith* related to women, for example, to contextualize them within the historical moments that informed

their authors' lived experiences and, through this, bring their infallibility into question. Moreover, for Mernissi (1996) dominant exegetical practices obfuscate the many different ways in which Islam is liberatory for women and justify women's subservience. Pointing to examples of how women's sexuality is expounded in the Quran, Mernissi (1987) argues that Islam not only permits a robust sexuality, but that it is an exceptional vehicle for attaining women's liberation because of how sexuality is conceptualized in the Quran.

For these Islamic feminists, women's emancipation and empowerment is not only possible, but also preferable in and through Islam. This form of 'Islamic feminism' appeals to many women's rights organizations and feminist scholars such as Margot Badran (Badran, 1999), Fadwa El Guindi (2005), and Afsaneh Najmabadi (2000) because of its compatibility with secular feminist goals. For instance, Badran (1999), a strong proponent of 'Islamic feminism' as the only vehicle through which gender equality can be realized in the Middle East, locates Islamic feminism somewhere "between secular feminism and masculinist Islamism" (p. 164). Badran thus constructs a spectrum that enables a spatial conceptualization of 'Islamic feminism', whereby it is (de)legitimized through its distance or proximity from Islamic fundamentalism and secular feminism. The impetus behind Badran's endorsement of Islamic feminism is her belief that "the majority of Muslims can associate only with a 'feminism' that is explicitly 'Islamic'" (p. 164). According to Badran (1999), even though it is a classed practice, gender-inclusive *ijtihad* presents a new opportunity that provides an entry point to public spaces for at least some women in Islamic societies. Mernissi, Barlas, Hassan, and Wadud thus represent exemplary approaches to issues such as men's authority over women for Badran because they seek to

negate it by identifying faulty interpretive techniques and propose their own interpretations of Islamic texts.

By identifying specific elements of 'Islamic feminism' that make it 'Islamic' or 'feminist', much scholarship on 'Islamic feminism' functions within the dichotomous framework of an Islam-feminism spectrum. Fadwa El Guindi (2005), for example, upholds 'Islamic feminism' as an authentic feminist project that is "feminist because it seeks to liberate womanhood" and "Islamic because its premises are embedded in Islamic principles and values" (p. 71). Though El Guindi makes an important contribution in arguing for the recognition of the cultural "groundedness" (p. 60) of all feminisms, she still has a universal idea of the eschatology of feminism. This, in turn, produces a normative Muslim feminist subject. That is to say, El Guindi attributes relationality to the means of achieving feminist goals, but does not allow for a relational understanding of how these goals are continually constituted and reconstituted through different historical and social contexts and encounters.

For Afsaneh Najmabadi (2000), another strong proponent of 'Islamic feminism', gender-inclusive *ijtihad* acquires significance as a 'feminist' practice because it claims a space for women to publicly participate in *ijtihad*. By engaging in *ijtihad*, women would be able to contribute to "a radical decentering" (Najmabadi, 2000, p. 31) of male clergy from the domain of interpretation. Though Najmabadi's works (2005, 2000, 2006) make a significant contribution to blurring the boundary between 'Islam' and 'secularism', a dichotomy between 'Islam' and 'feminism' haunts her comments on *ijtihad* in that her affirmations of feminist *ijtihad* are based on their ability to dismantle androcentricity in

Islamic praxis (2000, p. 31). As such, women's reinterpretations of Islamic doctrine only gain 'feminist' ground insofar as they challenge male-centered institutions.

Implicit in these endorsements is the idea that Islamic feminism is not quite feminist and not quite fundamentalist but the best that can be hoped for in Islamic societies. For those who argue that Islamic feminism is the only viable 'feminism' for Islamic societies, the 'Muslim woman' figures as an empowered and revolutionary agent who not only presents a challenge to fundamentalist subordination of women but also withstands Western influence in her struggle because she is protected from "westoxication" (Abu-Lughod, 1998, p. 14) by virtue of retaining her Muslim-ness. Her agency is thus located in her resistance to subordination through her access and ability to navigate and negotiate the discursive terrain of 'Islam' through culturally sensitive, gender-inclusive interpretations of the Quran and the *hadith*. The appeal of this figuring of the 'Muslim woman' as a viable agent in a liberatory project is thus grounded in the idea that her resistance to subordination is an authentic and local response. So, for instance, because Al-Huda and Jamaat women do not engage in an explicit or intelligible program of challenging patriarchy, they would not be considered agential in this framing of feminism.

By contrast, in their respective scholarship, Haideh Moghissi (1999) and Shahrzad Mojab (2001) express little hope for this form of Islamic feminism in terms of bringing about substantive reforms that would challenge gender inequality in Muslim societies. They argue that reifications of Islamic feminism, like the ones discussed above, are a capitulation to the threat of being accused of imposing Western, modernist notions on non-Western societies. For Moghissi and Mojab, the logic of these reifications is problematically caught in the dichotomy of Islam and secularism where women in Islamic societies are

discursively homogenized and essentialized as 'Islamic', which, in turn, establishes the basis for endorsing an authentic 'Islamic' variation of feminism for these women. In this sense, as Moghissi and Mojab argue, proponents of Islamic feminism conceptualize 'Islam' as an over determined phenomenon in face of which secular feminists must concede defeat. Endorsements of 'Islamic feminism', in their view, are the result of a compulsion to work within an 'Islamic' framework, for lack of any other viable options. Though their critiques of cultural relativism in feminist scholarship are an important intervention, they are still structured by a dichotomy between 'Islam' and the 'West' whereby feminisms in Islamic contexts are only legitimated because of their similarities to Western feminism. These critiques of Islamic feminism, then, recentralize secular, liberal, rights-based feminism as the best way to improve the status of women and oppose patriarchal social relations.

Both Moghissi and Mojab see Quranic passages that affirm male authority over women as evidence of unequivocal misogyny in Islam. The basis for Moghissi's (1999) argument against 'Islamic' feminism and for 'secular' feminism is her belief that the concepts of "equality" (p. 142) in Islam, particularly *shariah* law, and feminism are diametrically opposed. Referring to Islamic doctrine, Moghissi argues that in 'Islam' equality translates to equality in the eyes of god with a necessary hierarchical differentiation in prescribed gender roles. While Moghissi (1999) acknowledges the existence of a variety of interpretations of the Quran and the *hadith*, she maintains "...no amount of twisting and bending can reconcile the Quranic injunctions and instructions about women's rights and obligations with the idea of gender equality" (p. 140). She contrasts this conception of 'Islam' with "feminism's core idea" (Moghissi, 1999, p. 140) where men and women are biologically different but equal in legal and social status.

Similarly, Mojab's (2001) assertion of an inherent incompatibility between 'Islam' and 'feminism' is based on historical examples of the institutionalization of misogynistic 'Islamic' practices that were justified by 'Islamic' law. Because of what they perceive as incongruent conceptions of 'equality' in 'Islam' and 'feminism', Moghissi and Mojab argue that 'Islamic feminism' is essentially an "oxymoron" (Moghissi, 1999, p. 142; Mojab, 2001, p. 131) that cannot lead to gender equality. Contradictorily, Moghissi and Mojab respectively argue against cultural relativism and for a nuanced approach to 'Islamic' societies while they point to Quranic scriptures to argue that Islam is inherently incompatible with gender equality. In doing so, they deploy a static definition of Islam and *shariah* where both are essentially and irreducibly fixed in their reading of scripture, thereby ignoring the contingent ways Islam is constituted and lived. Furthermore, their analysis is structured by their commitments to a particular conception of "gender equality" as a central feminist desire.

Such articulations of 'Islamic feminism' employ, to put it in Saadia Toor's (2011a) words, "a framework which begins with the prior assumption that something called 'Islam' determines the status of women and sexual minorities in 'the Muslim world'", which is "simply not intellectually useful and is in fact politically dangerous" (para. 2). The danger of this framework is evident in the reductive understanding of women's experiences of oppression, where Islam is understood to be the central source of women's oppression. Toor's (2011b) work is an important intervention in the literature on the relationship between gender and Islam as it moves away from conventional frameworks that suggest that it is important to understand the construction of Islam to understand how gender is regulated and, instead, suggests that it is important to understand norms of gender and

sexuality to understand how Islam is constructed and deployed in particular instances. The implications of Toor's (2011b) inversion are significant in terms of how we understand the gendered politics of piety emerging out of women's participation in organizations like Al-Huda and the Jamaat. For one, it supports a shift away from the problematic Islamic exceptionalism that seeks to understand the moral regulation of gender and sexuality through the "singular frame of Islam" (Toor, 2011b, p. 139) – a pitfall that plagues much of the literature on gender and Islam in Pakistan. It also opens up a space for considering multiple and intersecting structures of privilege that constitute a particular manifestation of patriarchal power.

Clearly, much of the discussion in the literature on Islamic feminism understands the struggles of Muslim women through the "singular frame of Islam". In particular, questions around the compatibility between 'Islam' and a scripted, secular, rights-based 'feminism' frame analyses of the possibilities and limitations of 'Islamic feminism'. Despite the divergence in the means to achieving feminist goals between the advocates and critics of Islamic feminism discussed above, they do converge on the goals of feminist organizing: That is, a similar feminist "subject of freedom" (Mahmood, 2005, p. 1) underwrites their relationships to Islam. Both these conceptualizations discursively locate 'Islamic feminism' on a spectrum based on its proximity/distance from secular feminism, which, sets up secular feminism as an implicit referent and its telos as universally desired. As Sara Ahmed (2000) reminds us, the universalization of feminist ideals is based on the assumption that one has "gotten close enough to the truth of the Other's (well) being" (p. 166). Knowledge claims about the other thus not only include who the other is, but also who the other should become, whether they know it or not. These prescriptive claims institute processes

of subject formation that reflect and are limited to the secular temporality of a universalized feminist subject.

While the mobilization of universal rights discourse in the struggle for women's rights in Pakistan is meant to counter the religio-nationalist state, it produces its own forms of governmentality that is linked to the workings of the "empire-state" (Mongia, 2012, p. 199). Mongia's formulation of the empire-state has significant implications for how we understand discourses of universal human rights because it brings into question the possibility of transcending the nation-state by appealing to mechanisms of international governance. Moreover, it brings into question this very separation between the nation-state and imperial circuits of power. Mongia suggests that the empire-state enables a reformulation of spatio-temporal analysis that moves away from privileging the nation-state as a contained category of analysis and focuses on imperial connectivities and colonial formations, which contributes to "historiciz[ing] the transnational" (p. 199). Inderpal Grewal (2005) suggests that universal human rights discourse is imbricated in global geo-politics as a "regime of truth" that is connected to vast transnational networks of knowledge and power. By producing a so-called universal morality against which the welfare of populations all over the world can be measured, "human rights regimes" (Grewal, 2005, p. 126) serve the interests of imperialist interventions because they claim to have a universal solution to injustice and inequality. Grewal (2005) goes on to suggest that the assertion of "women's rights as human rights" (p. 127) relies on the characterization of the state as incapable of or unwilling to address the injustices women face through the demarcation of public and private spheres, and on the assumption that international law is more just and equitable than state law. The notion of "women's rights" thus assumes a



universal sisterhood that mobilizes the category of women as a form of equivalence through which a comparative mode of assessment and intervention is legitimated (see chapter two). As such, women's rights and human rights regimes are inextricable from the complex operations of the empire-state and its "imperial territorial, economic, state, social and subjective formations" (Mongia, 2012, p. 199).

Pakistani women's rights organizations secularize the Muslim feminist subject in their articulations of resistance to the religio-nationalist state through universal human rights discourse. These organizations seek to contest the ways in which the Pakistani state uses juridical instruments to subjugate women by looking to international governance structures for alternatives. Through their mobilization of universal rights discourse as a form of resisting the Pakistani nation-state, many women's organizations in Pakistan become complicit in the operations of the empire-state – for example, in imperial discourses of the War on Terror. For these organizations, the relationship between women and Islam is caught in a binarized understanding of the religio-nationalist state and the transnational via universal rights discourse.

### **Trajectories of Pakistani 'Islamic feminism'**

In their articulations of 'Islamic feminism', many Pakistani women's rights organizations such as Shirkat Gah, Women Living Under Muslim Laws, and Aurat Foundation reproduce prescriptive claims that presume and produce a secular feminist subject. As mentioned earlier, some of these organizations acquired prominence when they came together under the umbrella of the Women's Action Forum (WAF) and agitated against Zia-ul-Haq's military dictatorship and its imposition of the Hudood Ordinances and

policies that discriminated against women (Jamal, 2005a; Mumtaz & Shaheed, 1988). The struggle to repeal these laws continued well after the Zia-ul-Haq regime and saw some success with the passing of the Women's Protection Bill in 2006. While the WAF engaged with Islam in this way, founding WAF members' accounts of resistance to the Zia-ul-Haq regime reflect a sense of compromise – “an Islamic framework is a necessity and not a choice” (Mumtaz & Shaheed, 1988, p. 158). That is, they viewed this engagement with Islam as a necessary compromise of their secular progressive feminist principles for the sake of strategic interests (Mumtaz & Shaheed, 1988). Reasons given for the direction the WAF took included the need to appeal to a broad-based section of society, the need to stay within a religio-nationalist imaginary, and also finding the most expedient path to repealing these laws and furthering their feminist cause (Mumtaz & Shaheed, 1988).

Dubbed the ‘women’s movement’ in Pakistan by popular media and in academic literature, this ad hoc group of feminists focused on discursively reconfiguring ‘Islamic’ identity in order to undermine and diffuse the power of the Pakistani state’s singularized construction of Islamic national identity and through this, improve the status of women in Pakistan. In my interview with, Tabassum,<sup>57</sup> a senior employee at Shirkat Gah, one of the central organizations in WAF, she articulated the various tensions over Islam that they as an organization have been trying to navigate. She mentioned that working with and through Islam was the only way to have an effective impact especially on rural areas in Pakistan: “Islam cannot be ignored”. As such, Shirkat Gah, like many other rights-based women’s organizations in Pakistan, have engaged in a strategic process of rendering

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<sup>57</sup> I use a pseudonym here because much of her interview wove in an out of her “personal opinion” and Shirkat Gah’s official stance.

“universal rights” – as articulated in the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Convention Eliminating All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) – in Islamic idioms.

Part of this process has included a commitment to demonstrating the plurality of interpretations of the Quran in, for example, Shirkat Gah’s (2006) publication Aurtein: Qurani Ayaat Ki Roshni Mein (Women: In the Bountiful Light of Quranic Verses), where they provide multiple interpretations of key passages in the Quran that relate to the status of women by prominent Islamic scholars. For Tabassum, this was an important tool for demonstrating that the most conservative version is not the only option: “Why do we go for the most conservative option and not the most empowering?” The publication contrasts Urdu translations and interpretations of the Quran by Maulana Maududi, Maulana Fateh Mohammed Jalandhari, and Maulana Abdul Kalaam Azad.<sup>58</sup> According to the introduction of the book, the editors used the works of these scholars because they were the most readily available translations and interpretations of the Quran in Urdu.<sup>59</sup>

Tabassum explained that this publication is often used in the organization’s work in the field to refute “anti-women” practices that are legitimized through the claim that they are Islamic by presenting different translations of the same passage. These anti-women practices include practices related to family planning, abortion, child marriages, female infanticide, and education for girls. However, she said that one of the major pitfalls of

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<sup>58</sup> Maulana Abdul Kalam Azad (1888-1958) was a prominent Islamic scholar and a member of the Indian National Congress in pre-partition India. He produced his Urdu translation of the Quran, *Tarjuman al-Quran*, as part of his anti-colonial efforts to strengthen Islamic identity in India (Hay, 1988; Jalal, 2000). Maulana Fateh Mohammed Jalandhari’s translation, is titled *Qur’an Majid*. Maududi published his Urdu translation, *Tahfim-ul-Quran*, in 1972. See chapter one for a discussion of Maulana Maududi.

<sup>59</sup> Shirkat Gah also published a similar book using English translations by Allama Abdullah Yusuf Ali, Maulana Maududi, and Muhammad Marmaduke Pickthall.

engaging with Islam in this way is re-centering the voices and authority of male clerics in trying to bring about changes in these practices. Conveying her frustrations with having to seek legitimacy through male clerics for Shirkat Gah's rights-based developmental efforts in the field, Tabassum said "we don't want to end up empowering the clerics instead of empowering the women". She went on to explain that many women in Shirkat Gah are devout Muslims, but they can separate their personal beliefs from their work in delivering women's empowerment programs. When I met with Tabassum, she expressed that she was exhausted, frustrated, tired, and angry from feeling forced to have to speak through Islam and/or through male clerics. She felt perturbed that the secular language of "universal rights" was insufficient. Nevertheless, she said that Shirkat Gah was strategically committed to changing the way Islam was understood in relation to women's rights by producing and circulating an alternative representation.

Another illustrative example of this representation of Islam can be found in some of Shirkat Gah and WLUML's publications that aim to historically legitimize rights-based feminism as innate to Muslim societies. Here I analyze their information and training kit titled Great Ancestors: Women Asserting Rights in Muslim Contexts, authored by Farida Shaheed (2004) and jointly published by Shirkat Gah and WLUML. The purpose of this publication is to refute the myth that the fight for women's rights was a strictly Western phenomenon by recovering historical narratives of Muslim women in order to produce a counter-narrative that, in turn, authenticates feminism as Muslim (Shaheed, 2004, p. xi). The book is meant to be a resource for activism that empowers women living in Muslim contexts by identifying heroes from the past who would make women feel like history is on the side of women who fight for their rights. In addition, this publication is also meant to

be a resource for refuting unrelenting and damaging accusations leveled against women's organization in Pakistan of being pawns of the West. Filling in the gaps of history and bringing it into popular consciousness is an important undertaking especially in the context of a dominant narrative where such stories about Muslim women are covered over. To that end this publication is a productive contribution to a counter-narrative. Nevertheless, the process through which these stories were recovered, chosen, and published reveals an adherence to a singular, universalist feminist teleology that explicitly seeks to bring Muslim women in line with feminist politics.

Shaheed articulates her understanding of feminism in her reflections on this process in the introduction of the book. Initially, the research phase of this publication was envisioned as a collective process with participation from women living in different Muslim contexts. These women were asked "to collect narratives of women they considered to be 'great ancestors' from their own historical context" (Shaheed, 2004, p. viii). Later, this methodology was abandoned because

not all the 'great ancestors' so identified displayed a feminist perspective: several women who simply fit the definition of classical heroines, known for military conquests or supreme sacrifices; only a few had taken steps to promote women's rights. (Shaheed, 2004, p. viii)

Shaheed thus took on the task of finding and compiling the narratives herself and ends up using a mixed method of primary document archival research and borrowing existing historical productions by mostly Western academics. The tension between historically contextualizing and universalizing feminism is evident in Shaheed's authorization of certain narratives as befitting of inclusion in the category of great ancestors. The shift from collective to single authorship betrays the underlying motivation behind this project to legitimize universal rights discourse by retrospectively validating it as historically present

in Muslim societies – as is made clear in the abandonment of stories that did not fit into and reproduce this discourse.

Furthermore, this shift in authorship also signals the deliberate covering over of the irreconcilable heterogeneity between Muslim women that would thwart the forging of “Muslim women” as a coherent category. In her explanation for why she had to change the methodology of the collection, Shaheed dismisses the stories the initial team collected because they were not feminist enough: The researchers had brought back stories about military conquests and supreme sacrifices – stories that presumably did not resonate with the intended construction of “great ancestors”. Shaheed misses or, arguably, rejects, an opportunity here to engage with these stories through the idioms of the women and the communities in the field who brought them forth. Instead, Shaheed focuses on constructing and maintaining a monolithic feminist identity for all Muslim women. The construction of likeness between Muslim women also problematically assumes that all Muslim women are seeking to fight a monolithic Muslim patriarchy rooted in a singular and universal Islam. The rejection of the stories the researchers brought back is also a rejection of articulations of the kinds of structures of power and privilege women seek to contest and inhabit. The complex matrices of power that women inhabit, subvert, and secure are effaced in favour of producing a strategic grand narrative about women’s resistance in Muslim societies. Thus, the move to single authorship reflects the need for a single story about Muslim women.

Moreover, although these stories are an important intervention and contribution to the historiography of Muslim women to some extent, it is important to consider how and why they are being invoked and re-told. Because of the increasing NGOization of many of

the women's organizations (N. S. Khan, 2004, p. 92), projects like the Great Ancestors publication are conceived of in terms of "capacity building" and "empowerment". Thus, these narratives are being mobilized in strategic and programmatic ways with the explicit purpose of cultivating a particular type of "civil society" made up of "Muslim women" that would be equipped to promote rather narrowly conceived women's rights. The "training module" included in Great Ancestors, for instance, is designed as a 60-minute "oral narrative" session. In this module, women would read out loud extracts from the great ancestor's narratives that have been converted into "a script of narrative pieces" (Shaheed, 2004, p. xix). The trainees would essentially take on the scripted voice of the great ancestors to learn how to fight for their rights. Given that these narratives were carefully selected by a single author in order to fit a particular idea of feminism, this activity serves a more disciplinary and prescriptive function. The oral narrative component of this activity, for example, is not one that authorizes and makes space for the multiplicity of stories of the women participating in the session, but, rather, it literally has them take on the voice of a great ancestor in order to reproduce a singular and coherent narrative about Muslim women that is compatible with normative rights-based feminist goals.

Such alternative, gender-progressive articulations of Islam and Muslim history became even more crucial to the 'women's movement' in the post-Zia era when "talibanization" became the concern of the hour in tandem with the ascent of War on Terror discourse. Toor (2011c) describes the popularity of the use of the term "talibanization" by "Pakistani liberals" (p. 194) as the cause of the anti-progressive and anti-democratic direction liberal classes and organizations have taken in recent decades, as exemplified by the open support of General Musharraf's *coup d'etat* in 1999. She argues

that “talibanization” has become a “catch-all term” that includes “everything from state-led Islamization efforts to the rise in social conservatism and an increase in public displays of piety” (Toor, 2011c, p. 194). The infamous July 2007 stand-off between the Pakistani state and female students at the Jamia Hafsa *madrassah* in Islamabad, also known as the Lal Masjid (Red Mosque), exacerbated particular concerns over the involvement of women in the dreaded “talibanization” of Pakistan. This translated to concerns over the threat posed by women involved in “orthodox” or “extremist” groups. Kamila Hyat (2008) chronicled the Lal Masjid incident in Shirkat Gah’s annual review publication Resist Terror – Work for Change: 2007 Events and Analysis, which includes several other “talibanization” related topics.

The Lal Masjid incident precipitated over the planned demolition of mosques built on what the Pakistani state deemed to be illegally occupied land. This led some students and staff at the Jamia Hafsa to protest through a series of direct actions. These actions included the months-long occupation of a library and a “morality drive” involving the abduction of prostitutes and women running brothels, shutting down video stores, and assaults on women wearing ‘improper’ attire. The Pakistani state responded to these direct actions by surrounding the mosque and launching a “full-fledged assault” on the Lal Masjid that lasted for hours resulting in over a hundred deaths (Hyat, 2008, p. 8). The state’s actions received widespread support from the urban liberal classes in part due to rumors that these students were harboring well-known terrorists at the Lal Masjid. During the standoff, Maulana Abdul Aziz, one of the leaders of the mosque and a wanted man, attempted to escape disguised in a *burka* with a group of female students who tried to abet his escape (“Mosque,” 2007). The Lal Masjid incident further entangled ‘conservative’



gendered religious practices, such as wearing the *burka*, in discourses of terrorism and security.

What made this incident exceptional in the minds of many Pakistanis was that these “extremist” actions were primarily led and carried out by women: What made these women do these things? What led them to join this extremist madrassah? In an attempt to answer these ubiquitous questions, Hyat (2008) explains that the motivating factors leading to the participation of over 4,000 female students in the Jamia Hafsa were largely socio-economic. She suggests that many of the students were from “far-flung northern parts of the country or from Azad Kashmir and belonged to impoverished families, though there was also a smattering of girls from affluent families” (Hyat, 2008, p. 9). According to Hyat, it was the Lal Masjid’s ability to provide these students with basic needs such as food, shelter, clothing and an education that drew the students – many of whom joined after the 2005 earthquake that devastated large parts of northern Pakistan. Thus, in Hyat’s and Shirkat Gah’s narrative of this incident, ‘talibanization’ primarily operated by taking advantage of desperate and vulnerable classes from northern Pakistan – areas inhabited by historically marginalized communities in Pakistan such as the Pashtun. The turn to religious ‘conservatism’, with the *burka* operating as a key symbol, is articulated here through discursively dispossessing the Jamia Hafsa students of political agency through a narrative of passivity and vulnerability. Notably, this Shirkat Gah publication arrives at a time when a nuanced understanding of ‘extremism’ is urgently necessary to move away from Orientalist discourses of Islam as inherently violent. However, socio-economic explanations that rely on the construction of a passive and vulnerable subject that piggybacks on existing racializations of, for example, the Pashtun, fall short of a nuanced

engagement with the politics of the students at Jamia Hafsa and render them in terms of victimhood and desperation with a subtext of racialized predispositions to violence.

While the religious conservatism of the Jamia Hafsa students is understood as a story of northern (read: Pathan), rural, poor, vulnerable, racialized victims, the rise of religious conservatism amongst the educated, urban, primarily Punjabi and Mohajir, middle and upper classes through Al-Huda and the Jamaat is far more confounding for rights-based women's organizations. Within these organizations' discourse of Islamic feminism, groups like Al-Huda and the Jamaat, who do not profess adherence to universal human rights and do not problematize conventional interpretations of the Quran and *hadith*, are characterized as hopelessly bound to a patriarchal version of Islam that is intrinsically contrary to feminist goals. For them, Al-Huda and the Jamaat's practices of piety are questionable in terms of the extent to which they can be read as agential or as a resistance to patriarchy. According to Tabassum, Al-Huda and the Jamaat represent "some kind of third-rate compromise" between women and Islam in Pakistan. In fact, for Tabassum, the popularity of these groups indicated a failure on the part of rights-based organizations like Shirkat Gah and WLUML to effectively promote universal rights discourse.

Indeed, Al-Huda and the Jamaat do not appear to espouse the same teleological Islamic feminist politics of the women's rights organizations mentioned above. Neither Al-Huda nor the Jamaat claim to engage in the interpretive practice of *ijtihad*. Rather, their "gender *jihad*", to borrow Wadud's (2006) term, only appears to overlap with the women's organizations mentioned above insofar as they challenge the dominance of androcentric religious praxis by claiming ownership of Islamic texts for women. Certainly, as piety

groups led by and for women, Al-Huda and the Jamaat do come up against the androcentricity of state sanctioned norms of Islamic praxis. However, even as women participating in Al-Huda and the Jamaat reclaim access to the Quran, it is not for articulating resistance to the notion of male superiority in Islamic idioms. Although they believe in and draw from the historical practice of *ijtihad*, they assert that there is no compelling reason for contemporary *ijtihad*. Instead, they insist on following the literal word of the Quran supplemented by the *hadith*. As such, they demand access for the purpose of learning and developing their practice of piety including a deeper understanding and acceptance of the 'subordinate' position of women in Islam, not against it. As Muna, an Al-Huda graduate and teacher, explained, "the thing is that if your husband tells you not to go somewhere, you shouldn't go. Don't disobey because then you are getting in the way of *hidayat* (Allah's guidance). If Allah wants you to go, he will make a path for you". In Muna's understanding, submitting to her husband's authority to a certain extent was a path to *hidayat*. She felt that if she did not adhere to this gender hierarchy she would obstruct the development of her own piety.

Similarly, Rabia, another Al-Huda graduate and teacher shared an illustrative encounter she had with her ten-year-old daughter over her understanding of the authority given to men in Islam: "The other day I saw my youngest daughter in tears when she came back from her Quran class – she was upset because it says that when your husband says no, you shouldn't even go to *Khaana-e-Kaaba* (Mecca)". She comforted her daughter by telling her to have faith and to remember, "Allah is on your side" and that "there must be a reason for it". For Rabia's daughter, the thought that her future husband could obstruct her desire to perform the pilgrimage to Mecca – a fundamental aspect of piety in her view – was

difficult to accept. That Allah would allow a man to have this power over her such that he could obstruct her devotion was a heartbreaking notion to swallow. Rabia comforted her daughter by reminding her that Allah does not ordain such things for no reason and that it was incumbent on her to understand the context and logic behind this command.

Like Rabia and Muna, many women describe learning to approach such topics with less hostility by first establishing intentionality based on faith in Allah and the Quran, and, at the same time, they would describe their commitment to rigorously interrogate and understand the topic through the space and pedagogical tools provided in Al-Huda or Jamaat classes. As such, their intended and unintended challenges and complicities to the dominance of androcentric Islamic praxis in Pakistan are articulated through the Quran and *hadith* and not through an explicit adherence to universal rights discourse.

Nevertheless, Al-Huda and the Jamaat are often perceived by women's rights organizations as pawns of Islamic patriarchy and/or co-conspirators with the religio-nationalist state. In her study of how scholar-activists involved in the WAF perceived women involved in the Jamaat-e-Islami Women's Wing, Amina Jamal (2005) contends that prominent women in the WAF understood Jamaat women's activism as a strategic mobilization by Jamaat-e-Islami men against the WAF's struggle to repeal the Hudood Ordinances. Certainly, for the Jamaat-e-Islami the optics of women supporting the Hudood Ordinances was an effective strategic tool in countering the WAF's efforts to repeal it using universal rights discourse. The WAF scholar-activists in Jamal's study took this to mean that Jamaat women lacked autonomy because they derived their subject positions from men. Conceptualizations of Jamaat women's agency and politics were thus tied to how they were perceived as a "site of a battle between fundamentalist men and elite women in Pakistan" (Jamal, 2005, p. 62).

Notably, as Jamal acknowledges, WAF women's perceptions of Jamaat women changed over time as they came to reflect on the problematic objectification that underpinned their view of Jamaat women. However, Jamal (2005) argues that the rhetorical endorsement of universal rights discourse by the WAF still facilitated an othering of "Islamic fundamentalist feminism" that secured a secular feminist subject (p. 60).

The discourse of Islamic feminism that women's rights-based organizations like Shirkat Gah and WAF perpetuate is illustrative of the limitations of secular epistemologies that privilege resistance as an analytic for agency. To reiterate some of the trappings of reading feminism through resistance, the reduction of agency to resistance in normative articulations of rights-based, Western feminism leads to a reading of feminist agency as it materializes as resistance to patriarchy. This is in part because of the overlapping prescriptive and analytical projects of Western feminism that seeks to discipline what it claims to analyze (Mahmood 2005, p. 9). Thus, a problematic dynamic is evident in much literature on gender and Islam that seeks to evaluate the feminist potential of a given relationship between Islam and women in terms of its ability to resist a monolithically conceived patriarchy. Coupled with a conception of Islam as inherently patriarchal and monopolized by the state, this conception of agency often translates to women resisting or reforming religio-nationalist iterations of Islam in the context of Pakistan. Essentialized figures of the other subjugated woman in Islam emerge within this critique of patriarchal mobilizations of 'Islam' by the Pakistani state, which led to the casting of particular forms of Islamic revivalism amongst women as an extension or an effect of patriarchal nationalism. As such, in terms of how rights-based organizations like the WAF perceive the possibilities and limitations of the relationship between women and Islam, there appears to

be a persistent slippage between Islam and patriarchy that lends itself to an intolerance and even repugnance towards 'educated' women purportedly compromising their freedom and agency by following an interpretation of Islam that does not comply with universal rights discourse. This, in turn, is interpreted as evidence of the successful seductions of a patriarchal 'Islam' rather than a consequence of intersectional interests and experiences.

### **Conclusion**

Between these competing narratives of the relationship between women and Islam, the ways in which the women I met understand and inhabit their practices of piety is rendered in terms of the extent to which they resist the religio-nationalist state. That their Islamic praxis ostensibly coincides with some of the ways the Pakistani state mobilizes Islam is taken to be evidence of their complicity in upholding a state sanctioned patriarchy. Moreover, the women I conducted research with proclaimed their Islamic discourse as "literal", which stands in contrast with the emphasis on *ijtihad* and plurality of interpretations in the Islamic feminism of women's rights organizations discussed above. However, understanding these women's Islamic praxis while taking up the spiritual as epistemological reveals how they are not contained by constructions of the gendered Muslim citizen-subject or the Muslim feminist subject. Grasping their Islamic praxis through these constructions invariably succumbs to the analytical pitfalls of secular epistemological frameworks and elides an understanding of the sacred as formative in conceptualizations of pious subjectivity. This is not to say that they are not complicit in heteropatriarchal religio-nationalism or universal rights discourse. Rather, the complexity of their complicities (Upadhyay, 2015), especially in relation to how it functions in relation

to racialized and marginalized communities, is better understood through an analytical framing that takes their particular notions of the sacred seriously. It is in women's notions of the sacred, that do not necessarily map on to secular definitions of 'religion' or in nationalist definitions of gender and Islam, where a more nuanced and careful analysis of dynamics of power can be evinced.

## Chapter 4: Contested Pieties: Sacred Epistemologies of 'Qawwam'

One of the first things mentioned by my first interviewee, Sumaya, was her struggle to develop her piety while abiding by her understanding of the *qawwam* (authority) of men in Islam. Sumaya described how she moved to Mississauga from Karachi after she got married at the age of 24. Before moving to Mississauga, she was a primary school teacher with a degree in education from a university in Karachi and she loved her job. However, in addition to the challenges of translating her accreditation and finding a job as a new immigrant, Sumaya ended up not pursuing her career in teaching primary school after she moved for several other reasons. Her husband had accrued a number of degrees from North American universities and worked in well-paying positions in multi-national corporations. Even though financial stability meant that they did not need a dual-income household, a major part of her motivation for opting for domestic labour over a job that she loved was her dedication to crafting what she understood to be the ideal Islamic household organized around a clear gendered division of labour, rights, and responsibilities. When we met, she had three children and was the main provider of reproductive labour in her household while her husband worked outside the home and was the main provider of financial resources.

Sumaya explained that her understanding of this Islamic household structure emerged out of her participation in weekly semi-formal home-based Quran classes taught by Al-Huda graduates. For nearly six years, Sumaya organized and attended such classes, where she learnt about different aspects of the Quran and the *hadith*. When I spoke with Sumaya, she had strong opinions about what makes a good Quran class. She mentioned



that she coached her current teacher, Dr. Rana, on how to deliver a good lecture, how to make use of media, how to assess and evaluate student learning, and how to cultivate an engaging discussion. However, she also mentioned that she knew that she would need to formally complete the Al-Huda diploma program in order to be recognized as an authority to teach these classes.

As such, Sumaya wanted to join the Al-Huda diploma program in order to bring her passion for teaching to her religious praxis while still adhering to what she understood to be the ideal structure of Islamic domestic relationships. However, she explained that her husband would not grant her permission to join the diploma program because of his concerns about the shape Sumaya's piety was taking. She stated:

After taking many home-based Quran classes, I approached my husband, hopeful that the time was right to ask him for his permission to take the Al-Huda diploma course. He could see that this was something I really wanted to do but he was afraid he would lose his wife to what he was thinking was a religious cult or something. He hesitated but then said yes for the sake of freedom, equality and all that – that I should be able to pursue whatever I like. I was so happy to have his permission because I would not want to disobey my husband's wishes. I was so happy because he even offered to drive me to the Al-Huda campus. I got all the registration forms together and got into the car with him and I was thanking him for his support the entire way. When we got there, I got out of the car and started running up the steps. I was so excited. But then I heard the car horn. My heart sank. I turned around and saw my husband gesturing for me to come back. I stood on the steps for a while and then walked back to the car hoping that he just wanted to give me something that I had left behind. He told me to get back in the car. I got in. We drove home in silence.

Sumaya's telling of her unfulfilled desire to join the Al-Huda diploma course reflects the tension that many women I interviewed faced in developing their piety through women-only spaces. As Sumaya mentions, Al-Huda reminded her husband of a cult, which speaks to his suspicion of exclusively women's spaces outside the home that posed the potential of altering his wife's practice of Islam in ways that he would not be able to counteract. His

suspicious may in part be due to rumours about how joining Al-Huda leads to broken families because of an intensification of women's devotion to Islam. Indeed, Sumaya expresses her commitment to obey her husband when she turns back from the steps and goes home with her husband. As she explained, her desire to wait for his permission was driven by her devotion to developing a pious spousal relationship where her husband would have authority over her activities both inside and outside the household. But, in some ways, this articulation of authority worked in contradictory ways as a barrier to the development of Sumaya's piety. When Sumaya described his momentary granting of permission as a matter of "freedom and equality and all that", she was referring to her perception of his commitments to liberal rights-based discourse. However, the withdrawal of his permission marks the limits of these principles in face of non-normative practices of religion. Sumaya obeyed her husband because his authority to give her permission was part of her conception of piety, but he invoked his authority to withdraw his permission in order to disrupt the development of this very conception of piety. Sumaya's description of his fears and discomfort of her religious praxis make it clear that she believed that only certain scripts of religiosity were intelligible within his ideas of "freedom" and "equality".

Sumaya is not alone in facing resistance to participation in a women's piety group from family members. In this chapter, I examine how many of the women I conducted research with had similar experiences in relation to their involvement in Al-Huda or the Jamaat. Their involvement was often met with anxieties about the corrosion of a modern, liberal sensibility amongst the urban, educated, middle/upper classes. While resistance to participation in these groups came through all kinds of relationships, the spousal relationship is probably the one that women I interviewed struggled with the most. In

their capacities as husbands, men often posed challenges to the types of changes their wives desired and embodied, however, many husbands also occupied a paradoxical position as both the obstacles and the enablers of piety. That is to say, many women maintained that their husbands were often the ones who were unwilling to lose their “modern” wives – who played an important role in their social and professional life – to religious conservatism, and at the same time women’s “subordinate” position in a spousal relationship was a key site in the development of piety for many women. We can see this tension play out in Sumaya’s story above when she described how her husband did not want her to enroll in Al-Huda’s diploma course because it signified a more conservative turn in her religiosity, and, at the same time, Sumaya obeyed her husband in order to comply with her understanding of Islamically ordained gender roles.

In this chapter, I critically analyze such (re)institutions of a gendered (re)configuration of domestic relationships that are galvanized by women directing the development of their own piety. I focus especially on women’s struggles to achieve personal relationships that abide by their interpretations of Quranic passages on men’s *qawwam* (authority) over women and the concomitant gender roles defined in terms of *haq* (right/entitlement) and *farz* (responsibility). These struggles to abide by *qawwam* are connected to broader conceptualizations and commitments to developing moral social behaviours and relationships, as mobilized in their centralization of *akhlaaq* in their formulations of Islamic piety. The emphasis on *akhlaaq* in the development of piety is symptomatic of the complex ways in which many women focus on the Prophet Mohammed’s life, *sunnah*, as a guide for moral social behaviours and relationships in their own lives. Situating an analysis of *qawwam* in relation to *akhlaaq* illustrates how

instantiations of ostensibly patriarchal structures by women work through a complex process of women reclaiming the *sunnah* and rescripting their piety, often in contradistinction to how relationships between women and Islam are articulated in religion-nationalist discourse (as discussed in chapter three). Thus, I also explore the extent to which my respondents' religious praxis corresponds with articulations of gendered religiosity in dominant forms of Pakistani national identity. More specifically, I examine how these aspirations to establish and abide by *qawwam* relate to the Pakistani religion-nationalist state's claims to configuring the domestic space and gender relations in accordance with their interpretation of Islam. I place the processes of religious subject formation through Al-Huda and the Jamaat in conversation with Pakistani nationalist temporalities in order to chart their intersubjective itineraries and explicate how they coalesce, contradict, and co-exist in constructions of the domestic space and gendered relationships.

Drawing on the interviews I conducted with women formally and informally affiliated with Al-Huda and the Jamaat, I elaborate on how women envision ideal Islamic relationships between men and women through the concept of *qawwam*, and how they described their own relationships with the men in their lives. Notably, several women also found *qawwam* to be one of the more difficult injunctions to implement in their lives because of how it came up against their ideas of modernity and progress. That is, for several women *qawwam* represented thorny terrain that had the potential of placing them on par with how their communities and social circles perceived backwards and regressive practices. Nevertheless, though ideas of and commitments to *qawwam* put women in difficult situations at times, as illustrated in Sumaya's story above, many of the women I

met still held sacred and partook in this prescribed gendered system as part of their practice of piety. I demonstrate how, for many women, their existing heteropatriarchal relationships did not abide by their understandings of *qawwam*. That is, even though these relationships ostensibly mapped on to the kind of gendered household structures that would be in line with *qawwam*, they failed to satisfy my respondents' notions of a comprehensive and meaningful instantiation of *qawwam*.

Their expressions of the inadequacies of existing heteropatriarchal household structures reflect the discursive tension between how the women I met conceptualized Islamic piety and how it was mobilized in religio-nationalist projects. To some extent the set up of domestic relationships based on *qawwam* appears to be commensurate with heteropatriarchal religio-nationalist configurations of gender as discussed in the previous chapter. That is, their reconfiguration of the domestic space includes the establishment of the husband and/or father as the head of the family and household and the relegation of women to reproductive duties and symbols of Islamic identity. However, this reconfiguration based on *qawwam* sits in an uneasy relationship with the ways in which gender figures in Pakistani nationalist discourses. On the surface, the women I conducted research with appear to succumb to heteropatriarchal religio-nationalist prerogatives through, for example, their emphasis on developing domestic relationships that comply with *qawwam*; the related importance they place on motherhood; and the regulation of their bodies as part of their commitments to modesty. However, in what follows, I argue that the religious praxis of the women I met, guided through their belief in the *akhira* (hereafter) and the corresponding emphasis on *akhlaaq* through reclaiming the Prophet

and *sunnah*, unsettles and reformulates the significance and meaning of each of these components of religio-nationalist discourse.

At the same time, this unsettling does not bring them into compliance with discourses of universal rights engendered by the women's rights organizations discussed in the previous chapter. Despite their commitment to developing what appears to be a patriarchal gender hierarchy in their domestic relationships, many women maintain a strong sense of "equality" located in the "eyes of Allah" in their practices of piety. That is, they are firm in the belief that men and women are of equal value in the eyes of Allah and that in the hereafter and at the time of judgment women will be subjected to the same level of scrutiny as men. This sense of transcendental equality, that is, a notion of equality formulated on the premise of belief in the *akhira*, catalyzes the form that gendered relationships take and the women-led processes through which it is established in the here and now.

### **Qawwam**

First, I turn to how the women I conducted research with themselves understand and live *qawwam* in order to ground their understanding of Islamic gender relations and domestic space in the specificity of their lived experience. The absence of scriptural sources in this analysis of *qawwam* is intentional in order to foreground the different and shifting ways in which the women I conducted research with conceptualized and inhabited *qawwam*. In an effort to avoid fixing the meaning of *qawwam* through reference to scriptures, I provide insights gleaned from interviews into how different women described

their own ideas of the concept and how they implemented it in their lives - keeping in mind that these ideas have likely shifted since we last spoke.

There were some common threads that ran through several women's understanding of *qawwam* that presumably drew from the more technical aspects of conceptualizations of *qawwam* circulated by Al-Huda and the Jamaat as a theological concept. In the interpretation followed by the women I interviewed at Al-Huda and the Jamaat, *qawwam* refers to the authority of men over women within the context of domestic gender relations and is associated with the gendered sexual division of labour, rights, and responsibilities. From what I gathered from conversations I had with several women, they understood the idea of *qawwam* as part of a broader system of social relationships with specific relevance to particular relationships. The *qawwam* of men over women did not refer to the authority of all men over all women. That is, the women I interviewed understood *qawwam* as relevant to familial relationships and only in matters related to the domestic space and limited to the functionality of the household. Having *qawwam* in the context of a spousal relationship meant that the husband would have the responsibility to ensure that the household was financially provided for and that there was harmony within the household, which also meant that men would ensure that their wives live up to their responsibility to provide reproductive labour in the household. These responsibilities could translate to the regulation of women's bodies and activities by the men in their family, however, this did not translate to absolute domination over women. So, for instance, in this interpretation men did not have direct *qawwam* over women's practices of piety, nor did husbands have *qawwam* over their wives' personal wealth and property. *Qawwam* operated through a conscientious, deliberate, and calculated arrangement in the lives of many women at Al-

Huda and the Jamaat and understandings of *qawwam* were constantly deepened and reformulated in consultation with study groups, teachers, and peers in face of challenges to its implementation (mostly by men). Thus, it would be reductive to read it as women's submission to male domination since, more often than not, the women I interviewed had a difficult time convincing the men in their lives to comply with *qawwam*.

Despite these common threads in the way the women I met with conceptualized *qawwam*, it was clear that *qawwam* is a shifting concept that acquires different dimensions of meaning and significance within particular contexts and circumstances. When I interviewed Fariha, one of the regular attendees of the Quran classes in Mississauga that Sumaya organized, she explained how she understood *qawwam*. She stated that:

Women have a lot of protection in Islam. Men have been given *qawaam*. I don't know the English word for that. But basically there is a status given to men. Men have twice the status of women. People take this, even in Pakistan, as a way of saying that Islam has put women down and lowered them. That too is not exactly wrong but there are also a lot of reasons for this. Look, women are not required to work. You should luxuriate (*ayyashi*), take pleasure, sit at home and relax. Let the man handle his responsibilities and you handle yours at home. If you want to work and take that on yourself then go ahead but it is not imposed by Allah. That is your call as a family. It's a different thing if you want to, but Allah has left you free of that [responsibility]. You don't do it, that's fine, handle your home and your children. That is very important.

Fariha frames her understanding of *qawwam* as part of how Islam protects women. Her understanding of *qawwam* is based on her underlying assumption and belief that Islam does not set out to harm or subjugate women. It is important to note as well that the discourse of protection mobilized in Fariha's comments draws an association between protection of women and the clarity of rights, responsibilities, and labour. Fariha maintains that it is incumbent upon women to understand that domestic duties are their primary responsibility, as it is for men to understand that providing a livelihood is their



primary responsibility. She also states that anything women do in addition to their domestic responsibilities is allowed but is optional. So, for instance, to work outside the domestic space and contribute financially to her household is an option a woman may exercise but does not have to, according to Fariha.

In Fariha's case, this clarity was crucial to how she inhabited *qawwam*. Most of the time, Fariha was managing her household alone with her two children while her husband worked outside of the country. With her husband being away for long stretches of time, the responsibility to maintain the household and raise their children, one of whom lives with a chronic health condition, became solely Fariha's responsibility. Accordingly, there was a sense of relief in the idea of *qawwam* that is reflected in her use of the Urdu word "*ayyashi*", which I translated in the above quotation as luxuriating. Fariha's use of this term is a reference to how *qawwam* gave her some respite in not having to be responsible for certain aspects of the household such as working outside the home and bringing in an income – a small luxury, so to speak, in an otherwise hectic roster of duties. In addition, the notion that Allah ordained this division of labour also made her everyday struggles meaningful as being part of the development of her piety. Thus, Fariha's taxing experiences of having to take care of her children and household while her husband was away ground her explanation of *qawwam*. According to Fariha, this division of labour is recognition and protection from Allah from the stress the double-duty of home and work may place on her.

Fariha's example illustrates how lived experiences give meaning to the notion of *qawwam*. As such, for different women, the concept related to their lives in different ways. While for Fariha it was a sense of relief and recognition of her domestic labour, others were not affected by these benefits to the same extent or in the same way. When I asked Donya,

a teacher at Al-Huda in Karachi, about *qawwam*, she was eager to explain to me how she dealt with her initial “gut reaction” against the concept and wrapped her head around the passages of the Quran where men are given *qawwam* over women. She explained:

It took me a long time to understand what that *ayat* (verse) of the Quran is saying where it says men have *qawwam*...as a woman there are a lot of things that are difficult to accept but what happens is, *alhamdulillah*, Allah is very kind. When you study His message in totality and you juxtapose it and support it with your understanding of how the Prophet led his life you realize that it is a package. Somewhere else God has compensated the woman as well...That is why there are these misunderstandings about Islam. People pick up things out of context. But to understand the context is a lot of work and few people want to do that work...Personally, Al-Huda has just made me more aware of my rights. I know that I should not be beaten if I am a woman, I know that I have a right in inheritance, I know that I have a right [to ask for a] divorce, I know that I have rights in different roles in my life and I know that within a certain framework, I am my own person, I am allowed to live my own life, I am allowed to explore my talents so all of that has been very positive...and also, I know better what my responsibilities are towards my family. It's a more balanced approach towards life and I think if its done the proper way it can make us a better society, better people.

In this passage, Donya conveys her belief in the need to engage in a process to inculcate acceptance of, and, indeed, desire for this system as the ideal way of structuring an Islamic society, which she saw as a necessary component of her piety. She went on to state:

It has been difficult but it has been a choice. If I compare it to leading a life without practicing my faith, [I realize] that [it] would be tougher for me because it is too huge a support system for me. This is what keeps me going. This is my core value now.

Donya suggests that *qawwam* is inextricable from the practice of her faith when she says that she had to make a choice between accepting *qawwam* or leading a life without her faith. In other words, it was important for Donya, like many other women, to secure the *qawwam* of the men in her life as part of what she comprehended as necessary steps to strengthen her piety. Thus, like many women participating in Al-Huda and Jamaat piety groups, piety and patriarchy figure as a “conjoined matrix” (Mahmood, 2005, p. 175) in her

religious praxis. Donya describes this process as one that would require the work of studying *qawwam* in relation to the “totality” of the Quran and *hadith* through, for instance, joining Quran classes. Indeed, it was her difficulties with the concept of *qawwam* that initiated Donya’s interest in joining a Jamaat Quran class in the first place, which she later left to join the Al-Huda diploma course. Moreover, being able to claim that her understanding of *qawwam* was based on her “study” of the Quran and *hadith* gave her some credibility when it came to attempts at implementing *qawwam* in her own relationships. Donya’s acceptance of *qawwam* as part of belonging to a system of rights and responsibilities came about through her more comprehensive and deeper understanding of Islamic gender relations facilitated through enrolment at the Jamaat and Al-Huda. In turn, to be able to claim acceptance of *qawwam* indicated a higher level of education and comprehension of Islam.

Like Fariha, Donya also framed her understanding of *qawwam* as a combination of rights and responsibilities that leads to a more “balanced” life. However, in Donya’s comments, there is less emphasis on the implications of *qawwam* on the everyday struggles of carrying the responsibility of reproductive labour. This may in part be because Donya was from a more affluent household in Karachi where cheap domestic labour is readily available to the middle and upper classes. Instead, for Donya, the difficulties in accepting *qawwam* were more so intertwined with the way she and her husband had previously associated themselves with a ‘modern’, ‘liberal’ lifestyle. To structure her household in line with *qawwam* would invite accusations from her husband and from parts of her community of backwardness, terrorism, and fundamentalism (which I discuss further later in this chapter). These discourses haunt her comments above as she preemptively asserts

a sense of individual autonomy and a list of rights that women are given through Islam – assertions which may have also been motivated by assumptions and anticipations of my resistance to the concept as a diasporic researcher based in the West. The meaning of *qawwam*, for Donya, is thus caught in her claims to knowledge about the Quran and *hadith* as well as the types of resistance she faces in practicing *qawwam* in everyday life.

Putting *qawwam* in perspective, many other women distinguished *qawwam* from a totalizing sense of submission by referring to it as part of a gendered system of rights and responsibilities that ensured a harmonious and structured household and society – what many would colloquially refer to as the (heteronormative) “family system”, which for them was the bedrock of a “good society”. This was emphasized in my conversation with Ghazala, a long-standing student at the weekly Jamaat Quran class in a middle class neighbourhood in Karachi, about how she understood *qawwam*. As Ghazala explained:

The very first rule of Islam is that a human is not a slave to another human – and this is also important for women to know. This cannot happen that one human can enslave another human or be their master. A subordinate is a different thing. That happens for workflow – that is a different thing. But otherwise a human is a subordinate to Allah only.

Ghazala mobilizes corporate business language of “workflow”, drawing on her experiences working in the corporate sector in Pakistan, to make sense of the practice of *qawwam*.

Ghazala’s understanding of subordination as distinct from enslavement and as part of a system of “workflow” is indicative of how many women imagined the family system and how their “subordinate” role in the household fit into the bigger picture of an Islamic society. For Ghazala, the distinction between woman as slave and woman as a subordinate is based on first establishing men and women as “humans” and categorizing the “human” as subordinate to “Allah only”. Thus, insofar as men and women are both humans and

subordinate to Allah, there can be no other master but Allah according to Ghazala. Her comments illustrate how she understands the subordination of women that is implicit in *qawwam* as a matter of efficiency and of having a good workflow within a system, and less about implementing an absolute gender hierarchy as such. As Rabia, a teacher at Al-Huda in Karachi put it, “if Allah had not made it this way, there would be anarchy in the house. The house needs a leader”. A conceptualization of Allah’s greater plan is evident in Rabia’s comment about the ordering of the household. The systematicity of *qawwam* as part of this plan provided a way of imagining it as more than just subordination as a result of male superiority or for the sake of male domination.

To reiterate, while *qawwam* structures gendered rights and responsibilities, it is not considered hierarchical in most my respondents’ understanding – that is, the authority of men over women in the household does not assume the superiority/dominance of men or the inferiority/passivity of women. Through an understanding of the systematicity of the gender relations ordained by the Quran, many women not only worked towards improving their own participation in existing relationships, but were also able to articulate the shortcomings of the men in their lives and in society more broadly. Romana, a graduate of Al-Huda, brought up the problem of men leering at women as an example of such shortcomings. She explained:

Why are there all these things to be applied to women when men don’t apply it to themselves? Women have to do *purdah*. Why don’t men lower their gaze when the Quran says this? Both are asked to lower their gaze. If a woman is even walking around naked, the man has to lower his gaze, he should have nothing to do with her. You have to be accountable to Allah if you don’t lower your gaze. Why don’t you then? Has Allah not given any commands to you? Has he only given commands for women? This is wrong. There are commands for both men and women.

In a similar vein, Sabeen, a volunteer at the Jamaat gave the example of domestic violence, “What happens if a woman is abused? She comes to us. What do we tell her? Practice Islam? Her husband is the one who needs to practice Islam!” Romana and Sabeen’s exasperation reflects a frustration and concern with the uneven application of Islamic gender roles that hold women more accountable than men. Their respective conceptualizations of *qawwam* come with an expectation of the specific ways in which men could use their authority over women. *Qawwam* did not entitle men to leer at women, nor did it permit domestic violence, according to Romana and Sabeen. While the institution of patriarchy through *qawwam* produces a gendered structure of power in these women’s understandings, it is one that is laden with rights, responsibilities, rules, and conditions that significantly mitigate the establishment of a gender hierarchy that would assume and reinforce the superiority of men.

Take, for instance, the renewed understanding and valuation of motherhood that sustains the distinction between authority and superiority and facilitates how women inhabit *qawwam*. In one of Farhat Hashmi’s lectures recommended to me by Rabia, Hashmi elaborates a variety of women’s rights in Islam and many of them are anchored through women’s roles as mothers. The status given to mothers in the Quran and *hadith* firmly establishes the importance of women as always already potential mothers and leaves little room to claim male superiority. This is not to say that women’s worth is tied to the act of mothering, but, rather, that Allah’s bestowment of the capability and responsibility of reproduction on women is evidence of the heightened value Allah places on women. For instance, frustrated with the status of women in Pakistani society Romana, who

incidentally did not have children, contrasted it with the status given to women in Islam.

She stated:

Woman is told that she is weak, less intelligent, but woman is not weak in any way. If she is weak, then why has Allah put this treasure (the responsibility to have and raise children) in her hands? Treasure is put in strong hands. So Allah could have given it to men, but why did he give it to women? This is my question for you. Why? Why has Allah given woman this treasure, this blessing, when the entire society says that her brains are in her heels, she is like this, or she is like that? Why did Allah give women offspring if she is weak and less intelligent? This is a big responsibility. If a woman is degraded in your eyes or less intelligent and everything rotten is in her, then why did Allah give her this? Allah did not think of her as weak. Allah did not degrade women. If women are not degraded in the eyes of Allah, then why are they degraded in your eyes?

That Allah entrusted women with this role was evidence of women's strength, intelligence, and virtue, according to Romana. This was in contrast to normative discourses about women's inferiority and the undervaluing of motherhood, which Romana described as a categorically un-Islamic way of thinking about women and motherhood. Romana thus mobilized the trope of motherhood in order to dismantle stereotypes about women and foreground the significance of reproductive labour.

Many women echoed Romana's sentiments when citing verses and stories in the Quran and *hadith* that would reaffirm the value placed on motherhood and the associated status of women. A *hadith* commonly cited in several interviews declares that the passage to heaven – that is, the ultimate reward – is at the feet of your mother (Ayesha, Ghazala, Romana). In other words, motherhood is not simply a gendered reproductive role, but it also functions at the level of theological evidence of the status of women in Islam. By casting motherhood in terms of status, responsibility, intelligence, and trust, many of the women I met reclaim motherhood both as an important Islamic duty and, more importantly, as evidence of women's eminence. This sense of women's eminence brings

the thorny issue of men's *qawwam* into some relief and facilitates a sense of confidence for women leading processes of religious subject formation. This articulation of motherhood marks a discursive shift from the ways in which nationalist discourse codifies women's roles as reproducers of the nation. The women I interviewed mobilized motherhood as evidence of their equality to men in order to reconfigure their place in social formations and to stake a claim in processes of formulating and directing subject formation beyond their given roles as reproducers of the nation.

While it is through a problematic centralization of reproductive capacity in a heteronormative schematic that a patriarchal hierarchy is complicated and destabilized for the women I met, many women used this understanding of motherhood to disrupt and redirect their familial relationships. Thus, examining the ways in which these women's articulation of motherhood relates to the mobilization of reproductive roles in nationalist discourse further demonstrates how the women I conducted research with have contradictory relationships with ideas of Pakistani nationhood. As mentioned, the institution of an ostensible patriarchy could be mistakenly interpreted as in the service of nationalist discourse where the domestic space and the regulations of women's bodies becomes a site for reconciling the temporal tensions in nationalist discourse (see chapter three). However, considered in light of the *akhira* and related processes of pious subject formation, the religious praxis of the women I interviewed unsettles the assigned role of women as reproducers and signifiers of the nation in the context of Pakistani religio-nationalism.

This is not to say that these women do not participate in perpetuating gendered notions of nationhood and national duty: In chapter five, I discuss how the practice of



*dawah* draws on ubiquitous discourses of women's roles in reproducing the nation and mobilizes a classed project of religiosity that dovetails with nationalist formulations of citizen-subjects. However, juxtaposing gendered notions of pious subjectivity in the Islamic discourse of the women I met with those in the nationalist narrative of the Pakistani state discussed in the previous chapter illustrates the contrasting ways in which these women's groups and the nation-state conceptualize and mobilize the relationship between women and Islam. As a principal component of both Pakistani nationalist discourse and my respondents' discourses of Islamic piety, configurations of domestic space and articulations of domestic roles and relationships become a site for the contestation of different itineraries of subject formation.

Relatedly, many women also clarified that their belief in *qawwam* did not mean that they were forgoing belief in gender equality. For instance, Shumaila, a student and teacher at an Al-Huda centre in Karachi, juxtaposed the subordinated status of women in the here and now with equality in the *akhira* (afterlife). She explained:

What is there, is there. A man can divorce a woman, a man can marry four wives, and a woman has to cover herself but coming here [to Al-Huda] and learning all those things from the Quran directly, it gives you acceptance. It says so, so it's okay. If Allah is saying this, then it's fine. I think that's why it's hard for people who are not religious to understand it because when you are studying the Quran there is so much stress on the conviction that there is an *akhira* and everyone will be repaid for what they do in this life – once you realize that, then you are like okay, alright, in this life I do have to wear an *abaya* and I can't show my hair and that's fine if Allah will give me something better in the *akhira*. At least in the *akhira* men and women will be equal.

Shumaila's comments reveal a sense of compromise in her references to what you have to do in this life to get something better in the afterlife. Shumaila asserts that veiling, divorce and polygamy are instances of gender inequality in Islam. Notably, not all the women I met would describe these aspects of their understanding of Islam in this way. For example, at

one of the Quran classes I attended in Mississauga, several women discussed their opinions on polygamy. One of them expressed her desire to be in a polygamous relationship to elevate her piety in accordance with her understanding of the *sunnah* (the Prophet Mohammed had multiple wives) but she could not convince her husband to marry another woman. Shumaila's comments, however, reveal her discomfort with these practices. The promise of equality in the afterlife, based on what she read and understood from the "Quran directly", not only tempered how she felt about gender inequality in Islam, but it also shaped the way she gives meaning to inhabiting this inequality. When Shumaila refers to her predisposition to adhering to whatever Allah has said, she suggests that she accepts *qawwam*, even if it is difficult and requires sacrifices, because of her belief in the *akhira*. Like Donya, Shumaila also links her acceptance of gender inequality to her experience of being a student at Al-Huda and learning directly from the Quran – suggesting that her acceptance of *qawwam* was an indication of a higher level of education and piety. That is, accepting and inhabiting *qawwam* is a mark of a true learned believer. In Shumaila's statement, she recounts a number of what may be perceived as inequalities between men and women in order to illustrate and emphasize her conviction in the *akhira* and to allude to an epistemological impasse at the register of (non) belief. Her distinction between the ways such Islamically sanctioned inequalities were understood by believers and non-believers reveals the *akhira* as a pivotal component of how she developed and inhabited a gendered conceptualization of piety.

Belief in the *akhira* posits an extended temporal and spatial social imaginary that complicates trajectories of subject formation. At first glance, the language of rights and responsibilities that accompany belief in the *akhira* renders the *akhira* as an elongated

time-space for the realization of liberal feminist ideals of individual equality and autonomy. However, I suggest that in order to avoid enfolding these imaginaries into feminist or nationalist temporalities, and therefore avoid setting up an “implicit referent” (S. Ahmed, 2000, p. 166) and reproducing universalist claims, further exploration of the role of belief and transcendence in subject formation and in claims of equality and autonomy is necessary. The *akhira* not only figures as a futurity or a deferred space of an alternative (and ultimate) life where men and women would be equal, but it also functions as a central concept structuring the everyday lives of women in profound ways. How do we understand everyday practices of inhabiting *qawwam* that are based on belief in gender equality? How does the *akhira* make itself present in the lives of women who are striving to implement *qawwam* in their domestic spaces? Many women referred to the anticipated encounter with Allah after death as what ultimately structured their lives: As Romana stated, “My father won’t be with me in my grave. And neither will my mother. They have to go into their own grave and I am to go in my own grave”. Romana suggests that her fate in the hereafter lay in her personal practice of piety and was not tied to what her mother or father did. Romana’s understanding of the hereafter produced a sense of accountability for how she lived her life that drove her to pursue the development of her piety.

The belief that there is an *akhira* coupled with the belief that individual women will be held equally accountable as men in the eyes of Allah mobilized a sense of urgency to gain knowledge about and reconfigure piety such that it ultimately serves the interests of women in the afterlife, which includes transforming their familial relationships to comply with *qawwam*. Moreover, acceptance of *qawwam* became a mark of a higher level of Islamic education and piety for some women, as exemplified in Donya and Shumaila’s

comments discussed earlier. It is in the context of reclaiming Islamic knowledge and practices as part of what would benefit women in the *akhira* that many of the women I met set out to reconfigure domestic spaces in line with *qawwam*.

### **Akhlaaq: Understanding the Social Ethics of Qawwam**

Nearly all the women I conducted research with understood and accepted *qawwam* as part of a pious system that governs their gendered roles and relationships through their eschatological conviction in the equal responsibility for men and women to develop personal piety and to (re)produce a good Muslim society. This is further evident in how women situated *qawwam* as part of *akhlaaq* (moral and ethical social behaviours) in their religious praxis. Their emphasis on *akhlaaq* derives from their engagement with the *sunnah*, which has brought the practice of emulating the Prophet Mohammed in their everyday lives into the purview of women's piety. Their accounts of how Islamic *akhlaaq* was implicated in their lives illustrates the ways in which mundane sites of the everyday are critical aspects of their processes of pious subject formation and how women find ways to engage everyday aspects of their lives in substantial ways through Al-Huda and the Jamaat.

Many of the women I met explained that the development of good *akhlaaq* based on the way the Prophet lived his everyday life (*sunnah*, as described in the *hadith*) is imperative for the successful development of piety that would benefit them in the *akhira*. It is important to note that by reclaiming the Prophet and the *sunnah* for the development of women's piety through the cultivation of *akhlaaq*, the processes of religious subject-making through Al-Huda and the Jamaat disrupt the gendered trajectories of nationalist subject formation, which did not extend the development of piety in this way to women. For many

women, (re)claiming the Prophet is a response to women's piety being trivialized in the project of establishing a monolithic understanding of Islam in Pakistani nationalist discourse as a "brotherhood" or "fraternity" (see chapter three) where the Prophet is claimed as male and for men and his incidental interactions with women are the only parts of the *sunnah* that are considered relevant to women. Through their emphasis on *akhlaaq*, the women I met unsettle this gendered reading of the *sunnah* within dominant religio-nationalist discourses of piety. The everyday bodily, affective, ritual, personal and social sites through which women emulate the Prophet demonstrate the extent to which the Prophet serves as a degendered role model for women. In what follows, I elaborate on my respondents' explanations of *akhlaaq*, how it related to their practice of *qawwam*, and how this religious praxis complicates the gendered tropes of religio-nationalist discourse.

While the centrality of *sunnah* in Sunni Islam is not a novel observation, I argue that in the context of Pakistan, women claiming the Prophet as part of their piety marks a moment of disjuncture from the classification of women as symbols and reproducers of the nation-state. For example, recall the Pakistani state's construction of the Prophet Mohammed's daughter, Fatima, as a role model for Pakistani women discussed in the previous chapter. Although members of Al-Huda and the Jamaat revered Fatima and other female Islamic figures immensely, they insisted on the Prophet Mohammed as their ultimate role model. Many women I interviewed disputed the androcentric interpretation of Islam propagated by the Pakistani state, which claims the Prophet as male and for males, by centralizing the Prophet in their articulations of women's piety. Locating the Prophet as a role model for women unsettles dominant iterations of Islamic piety and, moreover unsettles gendering of citizenship along the lines of his rights/her duties (Saigol, 2000).

Several women I interviewed mentioned that they would approach various situations by considering the question “what would the Prophet do?” From the formalities of how to pray, to everyday habits like making one’s bed, women looked to the *hadith*, a compilation of accounts about how the Prophet lived his life (*sunnah*) witnessed by those closest to him, for guidance. The *hadith* thus operate as a manual and a measure of how to be a good Muslim. Most women referred to the *sunnah* when determining what/how to do things and also when determining what not to do: They used the *sunnah* as a resource for identifying and rejecting certain practices as un-Islamic (discussed in further detail in chapter five) and they also used it to firmly establish the Prophet as a role model for everyday life for all Muslims, and not just men.

For instance, two women I separately visited for an interview, Zainab and Romana, consented to the interview without reading the document I had put together with information about the research project. I offered to read it to them in case they felt it was too tedious to look it over but they declined. Upon my insistence they agreed but then referred to *sunnah* to clarify why they did not need to read the document. Zainab, explained, “Our Prophet’s entire life, every moment, everyone knows it. He didn’t have anything to hide...I don’t need to read that paper because I should have nothing to hide” (Zainab). Zainab refers to the *sunnah*’s very existence as evidence of the Prophet’s way of living where his life was open and instructive to others. This understanding of the Prophet influenced her decision and willingness to open up and tell her story with a sense of generosity. When I met Zainab again a few weeks after the initial interview, she thanked me for giving her the opportunity to tell her story because it made her feel closer to the

Prophet and to Allah. As such, the act of the interview became a part of her practice of piety as it gave her a novel opportunity to emulate the Prophet.

Romana, another graduate of Al-Huda, conveyed a similar conviction when she sat down with me for an interview. Referring to people who would be concerned about confidentiality, Romana said:

They are not clear on what they are here for. It's simple. I am not going to say anything wrong so why should I be afraid? I will be presenting myself in front of Allah, you understand? So anything I say, I am putting Allah first in my mind and in my heart the way our Prophet did.

Implicit in Romana's sense of confidence in opening herself up to me was a sense of how both she and I would ultimately be accountable to Allah. She seemed confident that she wouldn't say anything "wrong" and, at the same time, she was reminding me that I would be accountable to Allah no matter what it said on the consent form. To foreground the omnipresence of Allah at the outset of the interview was an effort to emulate the way the Prophet "put Allah first". Both Zainab and Romana used the exemplar of the strength of the Prophet's belief in Allah to give rise to a sense of fearlessness in telling their stories. That is, their understanding of *sunnah* influenced their affective disposition to the interaction of the interview, exemplifying how emulation of the Prophet pervades their lives.

According to several women I interviewed at Al-Huda and the Jamaat, to aspire to good *akhlaaq* rooted in a rigorous understanding of the Quran and *hadith* is a challenging and comprehensive project that encompasses all aspects of personal and social behaviours, relationships, and interactions. Little is left unscripted in this notion of the ideal Islamic society that takes seriously the common refrain that "Islam is a way of life". In the Islamic way of life espoused by many of the women I interviewed, achieving 'good *akhlaaq*' requires that people are aware of their *haqooq* (rights; *haq* for singular) and, perhaps more

importantly, both men and women need to live up to their *faraiz* (duties or responsibilities; *farz* for singular), which for many women in Al-Huda is the crux of pious social relationships. As Romana put it, “when taking what is your right, the fear of Allah is not present there. But to give what is your responsibility, there the fear of Allah is present. Think about it. Your *farz* is to give what is someone else’s *haq*”. When Romana refers to the presence or absence of the “fear of Allah”, she suggests that fulfilling responsibilities to others is the true test of piety because it requires a more pronounced consciousness of Allah. According to Romana, knowing and claiming her rights is an easier aspect of piety that does not require her to foreground the fear of Allah. As her comments suggest, developing a consciousness of her responsibility to fulfill other’s rights is integral to her conceptualization of what it means to fear Allah and be pious.

Ayesha, a student of a home-based Al-Huda Quran class, also explained her understanding of *akhlaaq* in terms of rights and responsibilities. She stated:

The bottom line is...there are only two things when you read the Quran, *akhlaaqiat*<sup>60</sup> and *ibadat* (worship). *Ibadat* are your responsibility and Allah says he can forgive you for not doing it but *akhlaaqiat* is tied to *haqooq-ul-ibad*,<sup>61</sup> that is, people’s right to forgive. So if a person doesn’t forgive you for something you did to them, then God cannot forgive you either. People just become obsessed with doing *hajj* and *umrah* (pilgrimages to Mecca and Medina). Some people go for *umrah*<sup>62</sup> or *hajj* every year! And then their kids memorize the Quran and then they think they are the best Muslims. They don’t even talk to their neighbours even though in Islam your neighbours have so many rights...not only the people right next door but 40 houses in front of you, 40 houses behind you and 40 to the left and 40 to the right.

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<sup>60</sup> *Akhlaaqiat* refers to the study of *akhlaaq*, however, it is often used colloquially to refer to *akhlaaq* in plural form.

<sup>61</sup> *Haqooq-ul-ibad* translates to the rights of people. In my respondents’ usage, it referred to the responsibility one has to fulfill and be conscientious of other people’s rights. It is closely connected to the notion of *akhlaaq* because it produces a practice of social conduct based on understandings of other’s rights.

<sup>62</sup> *Umrah* is the pilgrimage to Mecca performed outside of the times allotted for the pilgrimage in the Islamic calendar. Pilgrimages performed during the allotted time are known as *hajj*. Although the women I met understood performing *hajj* at least once in their lifetimes as a compulsory part of practicing their piety, they did not understand *umrah* as compulsory. Notably, many of them had performed both, indicating their socio-economic privileges.



Both Ayesha and Romana foreground the need to be conscientious of the social dimension of piety, that is, to fulfill their understanding of Islamically ordained responsibilities to others, *haqooq-ul-ibad*. This is an important and arguably a more demanding aspect of pious subject formation than fulfilling required practices of worship, *ibadat*. It also serves to strengthen consciousness of Allah, *taqwa* by making the fear of Allah present. According to Ayesha, while Allah may forgive the failure to fulfill practices of worship such as prayers, fasting, and pilgrimages, the failure to fulfill one's responsibilities to fellow humankind must be forgiven by other people before it can be forgiven by Allah. Her understanding of the power invested in people to forgive an offence and the need for forgiveness from others in order to receive the forgiveness of Allah produces a social dynamic laden with ethical accountability. In effect, this produces a "texture of obligation" (T. Ahmad, 2010) in social interactions by mobilizing a social discourse of being attentive to those around you, what your relationship to them is, and what it ought to be according to the Quran and *hadith*.

To further elaborate on what *akhlaaq* may include, I briefly recount one of Hashmi's recorded lectures that was played at one of the Quran classes I attended in Karachi on the topic of an Islamic way for women to participate in a *majlis* (gathering). In her lecture, Hashmi outlines several personal behaviours that are discouraged in a *majlis* such as yawning, looking around, arriving late, picking your nose, coughing, fidgeting, lingering too long after the event is over, speaking too much, not speaking at all, not listening, laughing too loud, not laughing at all, not smiling, and not interacting with others, to name a few. Hashmi's detailing of these minor behaviours as practices of piety are part of Al-Huda's discourse of Islam where every aspect of life presents an opportunity to practice one's piety (also echoed in the Jamaat). In another lecture that I attended in Islamabad, Hashmi

discussed the need for self-awareness in the habitual practices of everyday life. She implored her audience to engage in daily reflection on their habits and routines, trace how they developed them, where they came from, assess whether or not they were inspired by the Prophet's practice of Islam (as detailed in *sunnah*) and make changes accordingly.

The invocation of variations of these questions in dealing with a variety of situations demonstrates the centrality of the Prophet in my respondents' practices of piety and processes of subject formation. For example, Shumaila talked about the many challenges she faced at her elite college in Karachi when she started wearing the *hijab*. She saw a change in the way her peers interacted with her. Some would ask her questions like "what have you done to yourself?" others would avoid her altogether; some would inadvertently feel judged because they were not committed to developing their piety in the same way. At first, she felt angry and uncomfortable whenever she had to go to class – bracing herself for the next snide remark, or the next person who wouldn't look her in the eyes, or the snickers when she would excuse herself from social situations to go say her prayers. She responded to these experiences with reference to *sunnah*:

One of the greatest things, one of the greatest weapons – and this is something that Islam stresses – is smiling. It is stressed so much in our class [at Al-Huda]. One of the *hadith* is that someone said that they never saw anyone smiling as much as the Prophet. I thought that was a great motivation - that he smiled the most out of anyone. I think it just opens people up to you and makes them feel like they can talk to you and its welcoming. [When I started smiling more] ...that made people think that she's not the type that you can't talk to or something.

Shumaila relates this experience as evidence of the positive impact of following the *sunnah* in everyday life. As she explains, she was able to disarm her peers, change hostile relationships, and facilitate her own transition to a more visible embodied practice of piety (veiling) by looking to the *hadith* and *sunnah* for guidance on her *akhlaaq*. As another

embodied practice, smiling gave Shumaila the feeling of being close to the Prophet through emulation and, at the same time, it changed her presence and interactions in her social space, which facilitated her continuation of turning to and learning from the *sunnah*. Through this story, Shumaila also highlighted the ability to produce similarity to the Prophet through the simple act of smiling, which, for her, humanized the Prophet in ways that rendered Islam more accessible and applicable to her everyday life. For minor practices like smiling to count as a practice of piety made it possible for many women, like Shumaila, to conceive of themselves as pious. Moreover, the value placed on such quotidian practices through the *sunnah* also made the aspiration to piety a realizable goal for women. The *sunnah* are thus a central factor in fashioning transformations in many women's relationships to Islam by infusing their everyday lives with pious meaning.

Sumaya's recounting of her struggle to abide by her husband's *qawwam* described at the opening of this chapter exemplifies how husbands are positioned as both the enablers and obstacles to piety for many women. Keeping in mind that for many women, these encounters emerge out of the multifaceted reclaiming of Islam as the domain of (some) women, it is problematic to read *qawwam* as seamlessly intertwined with the heteropatriarchal religio-nationalist discourse of the state. At the same time, it is problematic to read their divergences from nationalist discourse as evidence of a culturally particular feminist resistance. As part of *akhlaaq*, the institution of *qawwam* occurs in tandem with women's efforts to take back the Prophet and the *sunnah* for the development of women's piety. The impact of the emphasis on *akhlaaq* in my respondents' discourses of piety is clear in how women described changes in the way Islam was present in their lives in relatable and applicable ways. Moreover, the intricacies of how different women

conceptualize *qawwam* reflect the complexity of the concept as it is developed and applied to women's lives and, most significantly, that it does not translate to an absolute sense of male domination for the women I met. Rather, for most women, *qawwam* was best understood as part of a divine system of rights and responsibilities – belief in which pivots on belief in the *akhira*, where women and men would be judged by Allah equally. The sense of women's eminence made evident in many women's comments on the place of motherhood in Islam further demonstrates how women reconciled *qawwam* as part of Allah's plan. In what follows, I elaborate further on the complex and contradictory ways in which women inhabited *qawwam* in their everyday lives.

### **Negotiating Qawwam in Heteropatriarchal Contexts**

It is interesting to note that the women I conducted research with established their commitments to *qawwam* in tandem with frustrating the male-gaze through women-only spaces. As discussed in chapter one, the collective, pedagogical, and discursive community spaces provided by Al-Huda and the Jamaat gave many women a sense of belonging and robust ownership of their piety that contributed to creating the conditions for women to begin a process of transforming their relationships, including bringing some in line with *qawwam*. The reclaiming of collective practices of piety were key to these transformations. That is, Al-Huda and the Jamaat provided women with communal spaces outside their own homes, where women developed relationships and gained Islamic knowledge with other women. However, as Rabia explained, many people she knew felt that women do not need to take up religious practices outside the home: "People say things like for women, *namaaz* at home is better...or a woman should not be leaving the house for *dawah* because her

responsibilities are at home”. Such approaches to how women should practice Islam led to a perception that women-centered piety groups had “messed up the priorities of women” (Rabia). That is, in these perceptions, drawing women out of the home for praying, teaching, learning, *dawah*, and/or volunteering, Al-Huda and the Jamaat impeded women’s responsibilities in the household. This stands in contradistinction to how many women who joined Al-Huda and the Jamaat expressed a renewed commitment to their household duties developed through the further strengthening of their knowledge of their domestic rights and responsibilities. This contrast is indicative of the extent to which Al-Huda and the Jamaat disrupt normative Pakistani scripts of gendered religiosity.

Ghazala explained that such resistance to Al-Huda and the Jamaat came about because they represented a shift away from male-centered Islamic practices that revolved around the exclusively male space of the *masjid* (mosque): “it was previously that father goes to the *masjid*, he learns something good, but he would never tell his family. He would try to practice alone” (sic). Ghazala’s description of the gendering of collective practices of piety reflects her sense of frustration with the centralization of the Muslim male as the normative Muslim subject of Pakistani nationalist discourse. In her comments, she attributes the curtailment of Pakistani women’s Islamic praxis to the gendered delineation of collective religious spaces. The controversy over women praying in *jamaat* (together as a collective)<sup>63</sup> led by women further indicates the anxieties over women finding a communal space for religious practice. Donya elaborated that at Al-Huda “it’s a big thing

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<sup>63</sup> The use of the term *jamaat* (lower case) here is different from references to the *Jamaat* (upper case) throughout this dissertation, which is a shortened version of *Jamaat-e-Islami*, one of the organizations that some of the women I interviewed belonged to. Here I refer to the practice of collective religious gatherings and prayers.

for women to pray in *jamaat* and women can lead women in prayer. [Some people] have a huge problem with that". Donya conveys her frustration with how women were denied the opportunity to gain the blessings of praying in *jamaat* when she refers to it as a "big thing". She perceived this problem as one rooted in misconceptions about women claiming "*imamat*" (religious leadership of a congregation) when leading prayers for other women. She clarified that a woman leading prayers for other women was not considered the same as a woman claiming to be an *imam* for the whole congregation (including men). Donya further explained that the denial of this collective practice was because of exaggerated fears of the potential of women to claim to be an *imam* that were, in turn, tied to securing the already established androcentricity of *jamaat*.

Shumaila also echoed the importance of collective religious practices when she described her first impression of an Al-Huda classroom. She stated:

I don't know what it was but it's a very welcoming environment and it's a very peaceful kind of thing that pulls you in somehow. There is a *hadith* where people study the Quran together and the angels descend, mercy descends, and I could actually feel that being there with these women.

Shumaila saw evidence of the special blessings bestowed on collective religious praxis in the atmosphere of an Al-Huda classroom. She related the feeling of peace that drew her into the class to the promises of blessings of mercy and angels upon those engaged in the collective study of the Quran. Shumaila, Donya, and Ghazala were aware of the significance of *jamaat* in Islam. Their comments suggest that they found it frustrating that whereas men had opportunities for participating in collective practice at the *masjid*, there was no tradition of women praying in *jamaat* in their communities and that efforts to create spaces for women's *jamaat* were resisted with fervor.

Several women I met described the multiple ways these resistances manifested in their familial relationships: Some men did not allow or made it difficult for their wives, sisters, and daughters to join these groups, others denounced the leadership of women Islamic scholars as inherently un-Islamic, and rumours abounded about what goes on in these women-only spaces. Accusations of “brainwashing” or “joining a cult” compounded the stigmatization of these women’s collective spaces. However, for many women, Al-Huda and the Jamaat’s opposition to the normative reservation of collective aspects of Islamic praxis for men was a valuable intervention that allowed them to elevate their practices of piety.

As several women I interviewed observed, many men in their lives guard the androcentricity of the domain of intellectual discussion about religion (and other things) by reasserting a gendered order. Opposition to Al-Huda and the Jamaat from men thus also emerges from their perception that joining Al-Huda or the Jamaat was a sign of women claiming the domain of religious knowledge and practice in a way that did not require the participation or leadership of men. Illustrating the patriarchal condescension that pervades religious discussions, Ayesha, a regular attendee of a Quran class taught by an Al-Huda graduate in a middle class neighbourhood in Mississauga, described the gender dynamics she observed in social gatherings as follows:

When it comes to religion, men can discuss things amongst themselves but if a woman tells them that it actually says this in the Quran they don’t take her seriously. This is an important thing to change...I notice if there is a discussion happening [about religion] where there are men sitting around and a woman says something and gives her opinion, these Pakistani men, they don’t really listen. Their reaction is that this is just a woman, what does she know. It doesn’t even matter if she is more educated than them – they will still think this. They assume that it’s a woman, she is going to speak illogically and she can’t say educated things.

Implicit in Ayesha's observations are her frustrations with how men dismiss her knowledge of Islam within her social circles. Even as she was deepening her knowledge of Islam through Quran classes, she found few spaces outside of the class to engage with others where she did not feel silenced.

Other women faced direct criticism and ridicule, often in the form of misogynistic sarcasm, for taking on religious education. Farida, a student and a teacher in an Al-Huda centre in an upper class neighbourhood in Karachi, for instance, frequently dealt with her husband belittling her knowledge of Islam. She stated:

If there was any issue, some religious thing that we are discussing, he would say things like 'You didn't know that? You should know these things because you have done the course so you should know. They didn't teach you?' Do you see what I mean? Obviously I am not perfect. I got taunted a lot that oh you are going to Al-Huda so you should have a lot of knowledge and you should know all these things. I felt very frustrated from inside.

Farida recounted how her husband would test her in this way to make it seem like her joining Al-Huda was a waste of time. She explained that this reaction was in part because he was not happy with her participation in Al-Huda. When Farida enrolled in the Al-Huda diploma program, it was in face of resistance from her family and especially her husband. She described his reaction as follows:

When I wanted to join the course I had some trouble with my husband. He just had something against doing religious things like this because he would say 'why can't you just read at home? Why do you need to go there and make it a big issue? Everyone reads the Quran at home and I read it with the translation at home. Why do you have to go there?' It was difficult to explain to him that learning from learned scholars is a different experience. Somehow I did get his permission to take the course and I don't know how we got through that time but he was not happy.

Farida's account of her husband's insistence that she read the Quran at home if she was so inclined demonstrates the layers of anxieties he had over her finding a community outside the home, and her becoming more actively pious through a space that excluded him. As



Farida explained, these spaces offered a means to gaining knowledge and developing her piety that she felt would only be possible through a relationship with a “learned scholar” and not on her own. She understood her husband’s taunting and belittling of her efforts to gain Islamic knowledge as an indication of his continued discomfort with her participation in these spaces.

Because of such suspicions and discomforts of women’s spaces of Islamic learning, many of the women I met were forced to negotiate *qawwam* in order to join and participate in Al-Huda and the Jamaat as students and volunteers. That is, these women had to balance contradicting components of their piety where their belief in their husbands’ authority posed the threat of obstructing the development of their piety. The way the women I interviewed worked through this contradictory balance reveals the limits and malleability of *qawwam* as a lived experience.

As Sumaya’s interaction with her husband at the beginning of this chapter demonstrates, many women had to contend with a deep-seated hesitation towards and suspicion of Al-Huda and the Jamaat to the extent that some men would forbid their wives (or daughters) from joining these groups. While many women gained access to the teachings of Al-Huda and the Jamaat in informal ways (home-based *dars*; online, audio and print material) without drawing much attention, it was official membership that garnered direct and explicit opposition from their husbands and created the conditions where *qawwam* became pitted against women’s piety. Beenish relayed her frustration with having to allay her family’s fears that she was becoming ‘extreme’ when she decided to join the Jamaat as a student and a volunteer: “People would say that I am going to an extreme and I shouldn’t go that way. This thing was something I had to explain to people. In my

marriage there were many ups and downs because of this but I feel like that's why I was closer to Allah". Zainab too faced resistance from her brothers for similar reasons once she joined Al-Huda: "They are afraid that Al-Huda might make me into Taliban. My brother told me that one day Farhat Hashmi is going to hand you a Kalashnikov! I said let's see! If she hands me one, I'll bring it to you! So it has been 10 years and she has not handed me a Kalashnikov (laughs)". These experiences demonstrate the ways in which negotiations of *qawwam* included negotiations with fears of religious extremism enhanced through the context of the militarized Pakistani security state and War on Terror discourse.

For many of the women's families and communities, concerns over involvement in Al-Huda and the Jamaat were articulated within the dominant discourse of terrorism as a perilous backward or fundamentalist version of Islam. In addition to being a testament to the ubiquity of War on Terror discourse, these fears of lurking extremism are also indicative of how the male gaze is frustrated by the proliferation of women-only spaces. Donya explained how opposition to Al-Huda (and the Jamaat) is articulated differentially by different sections of Pakistani society:

The very conservative groups are very against Al-Huda...they see Farhat Hashmi as a Westernized, radical feminist. Then the liberals say she is very conservative because she has made women wear the *niqab*. So, she gets that backlash from all sorts. Nobody is happy.

Several women understood these forms of resistance and ridicule as fundamentally about an underlying resistance to the leadership of women: "Why Al-Huda is controversial...this is not a misunderstanding. Our society is male chauvinistic. People cannot take a woman as a Quran teacher. I think it's more so that" (Rabia). Shumaila also observed:

Religion has never been the domain of women. Anywhere really, Islam was never in the women's domain and now all of a sudden [it is] – and I think that's where a lot of

the criticism comes from because Al-Huda is managed by a woman, women teach and learn here, a woman started it and [men] don't really know what is happening.

That major changes on multiple levels of self, family, and community are fashioned and enacted through these spaces intensifies the impact of this obfuscation. In other words, as the women explained in the above-mentioned accounts of their experiences, the men in their lives levied the charge of extremism in order to act out against being left out of a conversation in which 'their women' were redefining their sociality.

### **Navigating Heteropatriarchal Relationships**

The process of reclaiming religion and piety for women has, as would be expected, set in motion an array of changes in the way women themselves practice and understand Islam and in the structure of gendered relationships that are considered to be in line with their notion of piety. Perhaps the most vexed site of such transformations was the spousal relationship because of the obstacles posed by the *qawwam* of the husband. Many men in the lives of the women I met felt that the idea of *qawwam* represented an archaic or anti-modern approach to gender relations and they resisted having this particular form of authority/responsibility within their households. How would women persuade their resistant husbands to adopt a pious way of life while simultaneously giving him the place of the patriarch and trying to locate themselves in a subordinate role? How would women respond to their husbands' *qawwam* when it contradicted their practice of piety? For many of the educated, career-oriented women hailing from the liberal upper classes, *qawwam* was not only a difficult command to accept but it also contradictorily put them in the position to have to create the conditions of their own 'subordination' in compliance with

Islam within their households – a project that itself paradoxically requires women to occupy an authoritative role in their spousal relationships. This is not to deny that forms of patriarchy already existed. Rather, the emphasis here is on how women navigated and reconfigured these systems to comply with their understanding of gender relations in Islam.

As discussed earlier, several women clarified that *qawwam* was not equivalent to a totalizing superiority of men over women. Rather, their conceptualizations of *qawwam* drew on their broader understanding of rights and responsibilities as expounded in their explanations of their commitments to cultivate good *akhlaaq*. The range of ways in which women inhabit this conceptualization of the *qawwam* of men demonstrates the complexity of *qawwam* as a lived experience – which further complicates how we might unpack its association with gendered subordination in dominant Pakistani discourses of Islam and feminism (see chapter three). In the narratives of the women I met, negotiations of *qawwam* were entangled with their assessments of their husband's intentions and commitments to develop a pious household. These assessments determined how many women navigated their husbands' obstructions of the development of their piety. It also shaped their understanding of where *qawwam* met its limits. While not all women were able to act on these assessments in direct and confrontational ways, many of them engaged in subtle acts of subversion, which I discuss below.

When I started my research, one of the most common stereotypes I heard about the relatively recent trends in piety that Al-Huda and the Jamaat represented was that joining these groups leads to broken families. Speaking with Rashida, one of the media relations volunteers at the Al-Huda head office in Islamabad, I was informed that this was a rumour

that Al-Huda had to contend with frequently but she insisted that marital problems exist with or without Al-Huda, that Al-Huda only asks women to follow the faith, and that this accusation is more so related to people not being able to bear seeing an independently pious woman. While the bigotry of these stereotypes cannot be understated, there were some women who experienced disruptions in their family life because of the intensification of their religiosity. Donya described her experience and the changes it brought to her life and to the lives of her classmates as follows: “Initially the pressure was very strong. It was too emotional. We were literally ready to give up our homes, our lives, everything because the message of the Quran is so profound and it is Allah’s word so it is very very strong”. Donya described how many women she knew felt that their lives were in need of drastic change after hearing what an Islamic life based on the Quran should be. Donya went on to explain how Al-Huda had “come of age” since those days and, responding to those accusations, had now taken an approach that was more conscientious of impacts on familial relationships. Nevertheless, many women explained that they still found themselves torn by the tensions their new practice of piety brought into their households as they attempted to transform various aspects of their lives to adhere to what they were learning about Islam.

Many women I met mentioned that they adopted a non-confrontational and diplomatic method of dealing with these tensions that was simultaneously attuned to their husbands’ *qawwam* and did not compromise their commitments to developing their piety. Farida’s struggle to complete the course exemplifies how the negotiation of *qawwam* took place on a day-to-day level. Describing her struggle, she stated:

The course I took was 2 years long and classes were 3 days a week. I don’t know how I finished the course. It was very demanding. I used to do it tactfully. Like

when my husband came home from work then I would quickly close the books as if I wasn't doing anything and I wouldn't even mention anything about the course. In the morning I would try to go after he left for work and come back before he came back and not mention a word about it. His work timings are not so strict and sometimes he goes later to work. My classes started at 9:30 so I would pray that he leave before I need to leave! Sometimes when he would go at like 10 [o'clock] or something I would have to say okay I am going to class I could see in his looks that he did not like that I was going. It was very hard and it was Allah's blessing that I somehow finished the course. I would need to do my assignments and study for tests at home but when to do it? At night, we would go to bed together. What I would do then is once he fell asleep and I could hear him snoring I would come out and go to the other room and study and do my homework and sometimes it would be late into the night. The children were teenagers by then so they were not so dependent. There would be some nights that I would study till 3 am but I had this motivation that I had intended to do this and I wanted to finish. Then finally I somehow completed the course.

As Farida explained in this passage, maneuvering around her husband's work and sleep schedule was one way she thought to reduce confrontation over her enrolment at Al-Huda. But, as she explained further, she also withheld information and stories so as not to enter into a situation where she would have deal with direct forbiddance. Farida explained:

He never asked me what was going on with the course or how much of it was left or anything. I was also not bothered [to tell him]. I used to feel so restricted like I was bottled up. Sometimes you want to share if there is an incident or there are so many things that you are reading and you want to talk to someone about them. He was also concerned...because obviously the children were young and kids are kids and they are not perfect. We try to teach them but they make mistakes obviously. He would say, 'You should correct your children. What is the need to go over there [to class]? This is your *farz* to teach them to pray on time. It is not your responsibility to get in the car and go over there everyday. That is not your [Islamic] duty. Don't they teach you that? Fix your children first.' He did not pass up any chance to say things like this.

Farida describes how she did not wholly submit to her husband's wishes – that is, she clearly knew he did not want her to have anything to do with Al-Huda yet she found a way to continue her participation – but at the same time she did not completely dismiss his objections, taking care to not upset him, putting up with his snarky remarks, and thus ensuring that he did not invoke his *qawwam* to revoke his permission.

Describing why she took the Al-Huda course despite these hassles and objections from her husband, Farida said:

There was this thing that I am doing this for Allah. As they say the best thing you can do is learn the Quran and teach it to others – that is the best job somebody can do. That one thing is the motivation. I am doing the best thing. I wanted to finish my commitment to Allah and somehow finish this course.

As we spoke further, it became clear that she did not think that her husband would ever join her on this path nor would he agree with or support this commitment to Allah.

Instead, he was doing whatever he could to discourage her. Thus, to obey someone who had *qawwam* over her but was purposefully directing her off the pious path was something she had to contend with in creative ways within the parameters that she understood to be set out in the Quran and *hadith*.

Many women would understand Farida's story as one of admirable *jihad*. Rendered in terms of *jihad*, negotiations of *qawwam* take on new meaning as an opportunity to utilize one's knowledge about Islam and to strengthen and prove one's commitment to piety in this life by enduring and managing such struggles in an Islamic manner. For instance, Ghazala understood these conflicts as a part of a process of pious subject formation. Sharing her thoughts about her struggle against the objections of her husband and her in-laws, she stated:

One day I was sitting and I read an *ayat* (verse) and it basically said 'what do you think? Allah is not going to put you through trials and tribulations and just give you heaven?' I was like okay fine. If it is so that because of all these little tribulations Allah is going to give me *jannah* (heaven), then I should be bearing it! I should be welcoming them! And believe you me, the paradigm shifted.

Ghazala's describes the shift in her understanding of "trials and tribulations" in relation to the afterlife. As mentioned earlier, the time and space of the *akhira* bears heavily on how many women approach their relationships and, to some extent, it also informs how women

feel about these struggles. That is, reminding themselves of the prospect of the hereafter informs how women manage their affective responses by locating their struggles in relation to the afterlife. Fariha described how she understood the struggles she saw other women from her Quran class go through to participate in Al-Huda spaces:

In these houses there are a lot of problems and they struggle more. They have more *jihad* so they accordingly get more reward...We think that we are born Muslim and we will just be received in heaven because of that. Before, we used to think like this – heaven is there and when we die we will see it. But really it's here in life that we need to work and do things because when we die its over.

Fariha and Ghazala describe their understandings of “struggle” or “trials and tribulations” in terms of the struggle to practice their piety, emphasizing the prospect of attaining greater rewards in the afterlife through an opportunity to prove their piety in this life. In this discursive rendering of the struggle to practice and pursue the development of piety, Farida’s experiences of not giving up and working around her husband’s aversion to her participation in Al-Huda, for instance, acquire meaning as a process of being tested and strengthening her piety.

Negotiations over veiling provide another illustrative example of the complex ways in which women embody their piety while inhabiting the *qawwam* of the men in their lives. The women I interviewed were unanimous in their belief that wearing the *hijab* (the *abaya* and the *niqab* represented further elevated modes of pious practice) and dressing modestly was a requirement for Muslim women. Though the meaning accorded to veiling varied and not all the women I met wore the *hijab* as a regular practice, many understood it as a site of internal struggle and considered it to be a goal to strive for. In addition to their own hesitations and struggles, many women described how they had to contend with their families, and most notably their husbands, who were uncomfortable with the symbolic



baggage that came with veiling. Several women explained how they dealt with their husbands' objections to certain forms of veiling. While some women would put aside their own convictions on the topic to submit to their husband's wishes in the spirit of *qawwam*, others would find alternative ways of ensuring their own piety was not compromised. Sumaya, for example, had tears in her eyes when she described how much it hurts her that her husband does not allow her to wear the *niqab* (face covering) in addition to her *hijab* and *abaya* even though she felt a deep desire to elevate her piety through this embodied practice. Donya also described the challenges posed by veiling in her marriage: "Hijab was a biggie. It is difficult when there is an impact on your marriage. It was easier for my friends whose husbands were religiously oriented or who wanted their wives to cover. Those husbands were quite good but for me it was very tough". *Qawwam* thus posed an obstacle in the realization of the ways in which many women sought to embody their piety.

Concurring with Sumaya and Donya's experiences, several other women further explained how their husbands similarly opposed the embodiment of piety via the *hijab*, *niqab*, and/or *abaya* because it would be an affront to normative ideas of progress and modernity in the educated, upper classes. Farida, described at length how she faced criticism and ridicule from her husband and social circles when she started wearing the *hijab*:

I started wearing the scarf (*hijab*). Up until I got married I didn't take a scarf or anything. I didn't cover up. This was something that impacted me a lot. It is *haram* (forbidden) to show your hair and we are so casual about it and we don't care. Even though in my family, on my mother's side and also my in-laws, nobody used to cover their hair in any way and they were not in to religion so much. In that sense it was a big step from me...First when I took the scarf my husband was not so much upset but he was not very happy with it also. He would say, 'why don't you just go

properly covered. Our dress is *shalwar kameez*<sup>64</sup> and it is covered. Why do you need to do all this?' Then I started to go to this weekly *dars* and I started wearing the *abaya* also and with that I had to face a lot of negativity. My husband was like 'What is this? Why do you have to do this?' People used to ask me 'what happened to you?' as though there were horns growing out of my head. 'Why did you start this?' Explaining to every single person is difficult, no? At office parties and things like that [my husband] wouldn't want me to go covered. I can understand now also his thinking. It does make an impression. There is something in our culture that people who are wearing this are backwards, or that they are on a lower level, or they are from a low-income group, or they think that it is a mullah family. Anyway, slowly I convinced him but there were things like when we were going to a wedding or something and he would say please don't wear it today and just take your *dupatta* and I had to assure him that its okay and nothing will happen. There wasn't a big fight or anything but eventually he did approve...So this was something I actually had to face and in the family too it was the same especially at weddings people would say 'what have you done to yourself? Look at the state of you. Show us your clothes underneath. Are you even wearing nice clothes under there? Are you just wearing your night suit?' Of course it is very convenient because you don't have to dress up in a way (laughs). Colleagues would say things like 'you must be able to get ready so quickly in the morning? Show us. Are you even wearing proper clothes under there? Do you even need to iron your clothes or do you just come like that?' Well these are jokes and I understand that, but it gets annoying.

Farida explained that her decision and desire to wear the *hijab* emerged as she gained more knowledge of the Quran through study at Al-Huda. As is evident in her exasperation at how dismissive others are of Quranic passages that instruct women to cover their hair, Farida asserts that the *hijab* is an essential part of her piety and, thus, she remained committed to the practice despite the struggles she faced within her family and social circle. Farida understood her husband's discomfort with her presence at his office parties as her failed status as a symbol of his modernity. That her *hijab* indicated that their family culture was "backwards" or of a "lower level" reflects the complex entanglements of discourses of terrorism and class status that constitute his attachments to modernity. Farida eventually gained a fragile approval from her husband for her practice of covering

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<sup>64</sup> Outfit commonly worn by women in Pakistan consisting of a long shirt (*kameez*), loose pants (*shalwar*), and a long and wide shawl (*dupatta*).

but it still required her to do the work of providing constant assurances that “nothing will happen.”

Farida’s experience is similar to that of many women who join Al-Huda and the Jamaat and go through a transformation of their religious practice. For many, the *hijab* aesthetically cemented their status as an anomaly within their families, which, in turn, made them vulnerable to outright aggressive and passive aggressive scrutiny and accusations of being lower class, “backwards”, “fundamentalists” or “extremists.” Like Farida, Donya also had to contend with her upper class family’s anxieties about losing class status because of her *hijab*. She recounted:

I remember instances in which I would be in a gathering and my brothers literally pulled the scarf off my head because they said ‘you look like a *maasi* (domestic worker).’ Yeah, you know we have a certain kind of position in society and [they are worried about] what will people think? I have actually been through that phase with my family and it was extremely difficult.

In these comments, Donya explains that for her brothers the *hijab* marked the gendered embodiment of class status. She described the extent to which her brothers saw her *hijab* as a threat to their status when she mentions the physical aggressions she faced when her they pulled off her *hijab* in social settings. That they pulled of her hijab in public is symptomatic of the impunity with which such logics circulate in their social circles. Their association of the *hijab* with domestic workers is arguably tied to the common practice of women covering their heads, at times as a matter of practicality, when using public transport. Donya’s *hijab* thus not only reflected an anti-modern turn in her religiosity, but it also projected an image that she might be one of those women who has to take public transportation to get to their places of employment.

Furthermore, talking about the difference between her and her mother-in-law, Donya observed the difficulty people have in seeing a younger generation of women taking on religion and disrupting the given expectation of the elders being the repository of piety:

You see the assigned roles in this society - the elders are always the more religious. When, as a daughter-in-law, you become more religious, you start wearing the *hijab*, then you are expected to be a saint and of course no one is perfect, but you are expected to be on perfect good behaviour all the time because you are a religious person. It's scary. They say, 'You study the Quran, how can you let yourself get angry? You study the Quran, how come we saw you at the cinema? You study the Quran, how can you smoke?' You have to start portraying an image and there is a lot of internal struggle to deal with this expectation.

Both Farida and Donya's experiences are marked by a sense of isolation borne out of going against the grain of established scripts of religiosity; not only do they change the script with a new approach to piety, but they also claim piety as their domain in order to make space for their practice. In addition to displacing the dominance of male clerics in the production and dissemination of religious knowledge, such claims also challenge the idioms of piety in the liberal upper classes where the (loosely) covered head of an 'elder' woman is an intelligible and acceptable symbol of piety while the *hijab* on a younger woman's head is read as a red flag for the infiltration of 'mullahs' or 'fundamentalism'.<sup>65</sup>

Farida's experience of being subjected to these stereotypes and of having to respond to family members, friends, and colleagues who felt entitled to an explanation for her choice to wear the *hijab* and *abaya*, was echoed in Rabia's recollections of interactions with her son: "My older son was in grade 9 at the time [I started wearing the hijab] and he said that 'when you used to come to my school everyone used to say that my mother is the smartest looking and now my image is being ruined.'" Women's struggles against their

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<sup>65</sup> See chapter five for an elaboration of how the trope of the *mullah* operates in my respondents' Islamic discourses.

roles as the embodied markers of progress and modernity were further reiterated in Donya's account of the resistance she faced from her husband. In Donya's marriage, for example, the *hijab* came to signify a whole bundle of changes that occurred at once: "It was tough for him. You have a fine and good wife and one day she just starts covering and is talking about religion all the time, she is not listening to music anymore, she doesn't want to watch films with you anymore, she doesn't want to talk to your male friends anymore". Not surprisingly, Donya's choice to cover was the tipping point for her husband who was invested in the 'modern' lifestyle of the urban elite. She recounted his reaction as follows:

I remember my husband was pretty okay with the *dupatta* on my head...but I remember he was very ruffled when the *dupatta* became a scarf, then the scarf was pinned and then when I wore the *abaya* he started throwing a fit. Then a phase came when there was a lot of distance and he would say 'I can't introduce you to people anymore, I don't know the person you have become, I don't know who you are'...I kept on wearing it but when he was around I wouldn't wear it. Then one day I went to him and I said 'you know I am going through these phases and maybe I will give it up on my own at some stage but right now I have to do it. If you want to divorce me for this, you are welcome to do that but this is my inner voice saying I want to do this for myself. This is my decision what I wear or don't wear.' He was still less traditional so he accepted it in the spirit of freedom. Many others didn't.

Like Sumaya's encounter with her husband described earlier, Donya's husband asserted his modernity by accepting his wife's *hijab* "in the spirit of freedom". Even though for him the *hijab* was antithetical to his notions of modernity, his acceptance of it marked a break from tradition in his view, in that he was not going to assert his patriarchal authority to forbid this practice. At the same time, Donya left him with little choice as is evident in her bringing up the option of a divorce. Donya's assertion of her practice of veiling runs counter to how some may interpret *qawwam*, but, according to Donya, this is an example of a circumstance where *qawwam* meets its limits. As Donya explained, her husband's

authority over her practice of veiling is rendered moot once it is clear that his intentions are not directed at developing a pious life and household.

For other women, like Sabeen, a volunteer and a teacher at the Jamaat, their marriages did end because of such differences. She explained:

The funny thing is that I moved here [to Karachi from Detroit] and five minutes later he got a divorce from me. He became totally Westernized and I was becoming more practicing and going towards Islam and he was having a hard time living together and it was because of Islam. That was difficult. It didn't shake my commitment. It really didn't. I knew I was on the right track...I didn't do anything wrong. The track was right.

Like Donya, Sabeen asserts her confidence in the way she was developing her piety because of its basis in her enhanced knowledge of Islam gained through her participation in the Jamaat. Sabeen further explained that her participation in a Jamaat affiliated group in Detroit had precipitated through her experiences as a volunteer youth advocate at her local community centre. She suggested that many of the problems that plagued the young people in her community, such as youth pregnancy, sexual violence, sexually transmitted infections, drug addiction, and child neglect, were directly addressed in the family system upheld in the Jamaat's interpretation of Islam. Sabeen described at length the midnight phone calls she received from desperate youth and the parents who admonished her for not telling them about their children's afflictions. As she became increasingly involved in the Jamaat affiliated group in Detroit, she felt the need to move back to Pakistan where she thought she would find a stronger Muslim community, free of the afflictions that were becoming a taxing aspect of her community work in Detroit. At the same time, she mentioned that her husband, who was also peripherally involved in the Jamaat affiliated group in Detroit, was also facing formidable obstacles in employment and felt that he would be able to establish himself better in Pakistan. Sabeen explained that they decided

together to move back to Pakistan with their three children. After they arrived in Karachi, her husband was able to quickly establish himself in the corporate sector in Pakistan and became increasingly involved in the social life that came with a well-paying corporate job. However, her aspirations in coming to Pakistan took her on a path that conflicted with her husband's ambitions. Sabeen explained that her husband disagreed with the direction her piety was taking and tried to intervene, at times aggressively, in an attempt to have her play the role that fit into his newfound corporate success. That their marriage was troubled "because of Islam" put Sabeen in a position of having to choose between her marriage and her piety – she chose the latter because she felt that her husband was taking her away from the "right track."

By contrast, Rabia submitted to her husband's objections to her wearing the *niqab* because she respected his pious intentions in asserting his *qawwam* even though their understandings of the practice differed. She submitted to her husband's wishes even though this meant that her teaching repertoire at Al-Huda would be constrained. She explained her decision as follows:

I don't take on the *tafseer* (exegesis) classes – because I don't cover my face. They (Al-Huda) haven't said this as a rule but I feel that if I teach *tafseer*, I should be at the level of covering my face. That is one of the things that they have asked me to teach but my husband would not be very comfortable with me covering my face. A couple of times I tried to wear it and he said 'No, don't do this. Only do this much [hijab]' because he didn't think it was required... So I don't teach the *tafseer* classes.

As Rabia explained, even for people like her husband who was more or less supportive of her religious turn and was on the same page in terms of a commitment to developing a pious household, the *niqab* and Rabia's commitment to Al-Huda initially invoked an anxiety about extremism: "He thought they were going to make me *wahabi*. These people think that they (Al-Huda) are from *wahabi* sect. They are afraid of the *wahabi* sect". Many

women at Al-Huda have to contend with the accusation that they are practicing a *wahabi* interpretation of Islam, an Islamic sect that is often discursively mobilized as a gloss for fundamentalism and terrorism (Jalal, 2008).<sup>66</sup> Rabia submitted to her husband's *qawwam* in this example by not wearing the *niqab*, however, notably, she did not submit to his stance on the *niqab*. That is, she continued to believe that the *niqab* was required of women and in a small act of refusal, she gave up teaching the *tafseer* class in order to stay true to her own beliefs. Rabia excluded herself from teaching *tafseer* because in her understanding of piety she should be in the practice of wearing the *niqab* in order to teach it, even though this is not a rule at Al-Huda. Notably, Rabia's decision to not teach *tafseer* also exemplifies how the practice, meaning, and significance of wearing the *niqab* is not dictated by Al-Huda's official organizational stance on the *niqab*.

In Donya's case, if her husband had objected to her veiling on the basis that she was misinterpreting Allah's commands as Rabia's husband did, she may have not had the religious grounds to go against his wishes and may have instead engaged with him on the finer points of religious interpretations of veiling. However, because his intentions were not pious, and because they were caught up in the instrumentalization of her body as a signifier of (his) modernity, she was able to Islamically justify her 'disobedience' and risk a divorce. For others, the matter of assessing their husband's piety or intentions did not

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<sup>66</sup> While the term *wahabi* refers to the followers of Muhammad Abdul Wahab's eighteenth century reformist interpretation of Islam, the connotations of the term have transformed over time including contemporary associations with organizations such as Al-Qaeda. *Wahabism* is often associated with "conservative" or "orthodox" practices such as the *niqab*. For a historical trajectory of the term in South Asia see Hay (1988) and Jalal (2000). In relation to the women I met, they often faced accusations of being *wahabi* because of their embodied practices of veiling that took the form of the *hijab*, *abaya*, and/or *niqab*. Because these practices came to be associated with Saudi styles of veiling, they were often equated with *wahabism*. Moreover, this accusation was often used to insinuate that these women did not believe in following the *hadith*.



come up in the same way. For example, Fatima's husband asked her not to wear the *abaya* in addition to her *hijab* because he did not want her to be too different from his family who he considered to be more "modern". She listened to him not because of his intentions, but because she felt that she did not want to disobey him and go against his *qawwam* as a matter of the development of her own piety. Instead, she said that she believed in the power of prayer and that she would "pray that Allah will make him understand one day". Fatima understood her husband's objections to her wearing an *abaya* as a matter of his concerns over his image and social status within his family. However, she continued to believe that this was a necessary practice and turned to prayer as a means to bringing her husband into compliance with what she understood to be an important aspect of her piety.

Underlying these tensions over veiling was the dual role of the veil as an embodied symbol and an embodied practice (Asad, 1993; Hoodfar, 2001). The symbolic function of the veil was important to many women I conducted research with as an outward declaration of their commitment to piety, however, it was the disciplinary function of the veil as a means through which religious virtues would be cultivated in the self that they felt was lost on those who opposed their practice of veiling because of its symbolic baggage. For example, the mobilization of tropes of "backward", "extremist", "fundamentalist" or "wahabi" to forbid, intervene in, and/or ridicule women's practices of piety indicate how the veil functions as a symbol entangled in discourses of a 'civilizing mission', imperialism, and terrorism that many women had to struggle against. As mentioned, many other women who were the first in their families to take on the *hijab* described how they consistently faced the association of the *hijab*, *niqab*, and/or *abaya* with being 'backward', 'mullah', 'fundamentalist', and/or 'wahabi'. The valence of such accusations is symptomatic

of the confluence of the dominant discourse of heteropatriarchal religio-nationalism in tandem with the discourse of the War on Terror and the power of the militarized nation-state. In other words, emboldened by the ubiquity of War on Terror discourse, these terms evoke the need for military and/or developmental intervention in order to mock, fear or challenge these women's embodied practices. These accusations are particularly stinging in the context of the ostensibly unshakeable urban upper class support for violent military interventions in other parts of Pakistan, such as Waziristan and Swat Valley. As such, these visible markers of the wrong and dangerous kind of piety are an affront to the normative trajectories of subject formation in the urban upper classes. Notably, many of the women I met participated in these discourses of military intervention in complex and contradictory ways as can be seen in their own practices of racialization and marginalization of other communities (see chapter five). But it is important to note that women negotiated *qawwam* differently depending on their assessment of their husbands' intentions and commitments to practices of piety, which can be read as an effort to reaffirm the meaning of the veil as an embodied practice and not just an embodied symbol. Many of my respondents' practice of the *hijab* thus complicates nationalist discourses of gender and reproduction. The way they perceive their practice evades the ubiquitous relegation of women's bodies as symbols ensnared in the fraught dichotomy of Islam and modernity within nationalist discourse.

## **Conclusion**

Many women I interviewed understood the gendered system borne out of the Islamic concept of *qawwam* as an inextricable part of their practice of piety. The ways in

which these women live and inhabit *qawwam* demonstrates that this is not simply an instance of women submitting to male superiority. Rather, as is exemplified by the place of motherhood in the “eyes of Allah”, the belief in equality in the *akhira*, and the concomitant focus on *akhlaaq* in their Islamic discourse, the women I met imagined their gendered positionality in transcendent terms. In everyday life, this often results in the seemingly contradictory practice of women reconfiguring gender relations, in face of resistant men in their households, to bring them in line with their interpretation of Islamic ideas of patriarchy and *qawwam*. Some of the conflicts arising out of these attempts elucidate divergences in ideas of domestic space, reproduction, and embodied signification between my respondents’ discourses of piety and those mobilized in service of consolidating the Pakistan nation-state. For instance, the more visible markers of changes family members perceive in the embodied practices of many women are comprehended and criticized through the common tropes of discourses of terror that are complicit in strengthening the power of the Pakistani state through increasing militarization and surveillance. By recasting the gendered tropes central to nationalism, the religious praxis of the women I conducted research with comes into conflict with the heteropatriarchal religio-nationalist discourse of the Pakistani state. Because the ways in which many women conceptualize and inhabit *qawwam* does not quite correspond with gendered itineraries of Pakistani citizen-subject formation, it disrupts and resists the imposition of the temporal itinerary of the nation-state.

Simultaneously, armed with formal Islamic education, women were able to map out the boundaries of *qawwam* and its applicability and relevance in situations where their own piety would be threatened or compromised through obedience to their husbands. As

the examples of struggles and negotiations over veiling and joining a women's piety group demonstrate, the women I met had very clear ideas of the limitations of *qawwam* and were thus able to take explicit and/or implicit positions against demands that ran contrary to their beliefs. Paying heed to the multiplicity of refusals that constitute their inhabitation of *qawwam* is essential to a nuanced understanding of the structure of gender relations my respondents aim to establish where belief in equality in the *akhira* informs the ways in which women assert themselves. Moreover, even though many women faced difficulties in maneuvering around pre-established scripts of piety, progress, tradition, and modernity, the fruit of their collective efforts to bring about changes in their homes and communities is evident in how their credibility enhanced over time as their pedagogical pedigree found purchase amongst their interlocutors. However, while this chapter focused more so on how the women I conducted research with articulate and inhabit their relationships with Islam, in the following chapter, I discuss the implications of how the authorizing discourse of education in this religious praxis affirms and constructs forms of socio-economic privilege in order to elaborate on how these women are also complicit in Pakistani heteropatriarchal religio-nationalism.

## Chapter 5: Piety and Its Others

At an Al-Huda centre in Karachi's affluent Defence Housing Authority neighbourhood, a few Al-Huda students and teachers organized a weekly "*maasi* class" especially designed for the women domestic workers employed at the homes of some of the students and teachers as part of their *dawah* activities. The class took place in the same room as all other classes and the domestic workers used the same chairs and tables as all other students at the centre. The centre also provided these workers with a complimentary *hijab*, bag, stationery, and prayer books. Such 'egalitarian' gestures, while unusual in many upper class homes, were commonplace in Al-Huda's institutional spaces. As Romana explained, "in [Al-Huda's] eyes, the rich weren't rich and the poor weren't poor". She elaborated that everyone at Al-Huda sat in the same spaces, wore the same uniform, and rotated chores on the campus.

However, despite the egalitarian and charitable intentions of the organizers of the *maasi* class, many of the domestic workers I spoke with were only there because they were required to be by their employer. They explained how they were there because their employers arranged for them to be dropped off and picked up from the centre, suggesting that their mobility was constrained as they could not leave the class if they felt they did not want to be in it. Thus, regardless of the fact that their employers and the instructors saw the *maasi* class as an act of benevolence, this educational opportunity, so to speak, took place under relatively coercive conditions. Imagining a woman-to-woman "trickle down effect", to put it in Shumaila's words, from the educated upper classes, women affiliated with the centre dropped off their domestic workers for three hours a week to learn literacy skills, health and hygiene, their Islamic and civic rights and duties, Islamic knowledge, and

more significantly, to unlearn their existing practices of Islam. Some of the domestic workers I spoke with at the class described their existing practices of Islam as reciting verses received through the oral traditions of their families and communities, and going to the shrines of Sufi saints on special occasions – practices that would be categorized as *biddat* and *shirk* in my respondents' Islamic praxis. For many women at this Al-Huda centre, these domestic workers represented irrational, undiscerning, ignorant masses, that were susceptible to the influence of *mullahs*. As I elaborate later in this chapter, this construction of the domestic workers as under the influence of *mullahs* also constitutes my respondents' self-perception as learned and rational Muslims who are engaged in the development of an authentic Islamic practice. This discursive othering forms the conditions of possibility for delegitimizing the domestic workers' existing Islamic practices with impunity in the *maasi* class.

For instance, as part of their lesson, these workers were told in no uncertain terms that the prayers they traditionally recited were tantamount to a sin because they did not follow a rational engagement with scripture. According to the teachers at Al-Huda, the domestic workers' traditional prayers were irrational because they did not know the literal meaning of the Arabic verses they recited. In an effort to convince the domestic workers to change their ways, one of the teachers at the centre gave a short lecture about how the domestic workers' prayers could not be "heartfelt" because of this lack of understanding. Inversely, the domestic workers were told that any emotional attachments they had to their existing practices were irrational, and therefore un-Islamic. The ways in which the domestic workers' purportedly sinful prayers were meaningful to them, then, was rendered irrational because they were not the result of advancement through Al-Huda's

scripted stages of developing a rational form of piety. The possibilities of the workers' practices of piety were characterized as truncated because of their lack of literacy – read as a lack of rationality. Notably, the need to develop a meaningful and “heartfelt” relationship to the text is an important component in my respondents' discourses of piety. For example, many women I met mentioned that they valued and desired the ability to spontaneously weep when reading or listening to recitations of the Quran in Arabic. However, in their Islamic praxis these meanings and attachments are achieved through progression along stages of religious subject formation. They only gain their validity as part of the development of a ‘rational’ form of piety.

As I elaborate in this chapter, the *maasi* class was constituted through developmentalist logics of rational progress and the imperative for Al-Huda women to fulfill their *dawah*. The class itself functions as a dynamic site in the ongoing production of Al-Huda's discourse of piety that relies on its own conceptualizations of a universal subject. Situating the domestic workers within a developmentalist schema as inferior consolidates their discourse of piety as having universal purchase. That is, through the differentiated inclusion and/or exclusion of others, my respondents' discourse of piety extends beyond their immediate communities. However, the ways in which some of the domestic workers subverted the class elucidates the incompleteness of this process of consolidation. During one of the *maasi* class sessions, I met Nabeela, an older woman employed by one of the students at Al-Huda. She was particularly vocal and eager throughout the class and seemed pleased to be there. She mentioned that she had been attending the *maasi* class ever since the centre started it. At one point the instructor asked everyone to pull out copies of the Quran and turn to a particular page. Since I did not have my own copy, I was told to share

with Nabeela. Nabeela was more than happy to share. She opened up the book and placed it between us. I looked at the page and noticed that it was not the page the instructor was referring to. I told Nabeela this and she readily brushed it off but continued to share the wrong page with me. The instructor asked everyone to follow the recitation by moving their fingers along the page and reading out loud together. Nabeela placed her finger on the wrong page she was sharing with me and her finger moved through the text with confidence. The room erupted into a discordant recitation and it was difficult to make out what anyone was reciting. I could hear Nabeela reciting something but it did not match the words her finger was moving through in the book, nor did it match what the instructor was reciting on the microphone. She noticed my confusion and, in so many words, told me to just go along with it.

Later, the larger *maasi* class broke up into smaller groups of three or four women according to their levels of literacy. I followed Nabeela to her group and sat in on their session. Before the instructor had a chance to begin the lesson, Nabeela quickly and urgently took out a piece of paper from her bag and gave it to the instructor to ask her to read it for her. It was a prescription for a few different medications. The instructor and Nabeela then talked at length about the medications, why she needed them and how she would acquire them. I wondered why Nabeela had not asked her employer to read it for her. As Nabeela put away the prescription, another domestic worker began to ask other health-related questions. The instructor told me later that this was a common occurrence and that she was more than happy to help them. She explained that some domestic workers are afraid to ask their employers for help with health concerns for fear of being seen as unreliable or as a liability. For Nabeela, the *maasi* class offered a space for her to



gain access to this resource while reducing the risk of her employer finding out about her health conditions. I could not help but interpret Nabeela's eager performance in the earlier class in relation to this incident. While Nabeela was able to sufficiently navigate the class, her goals were not commensurate with the explicit goals set out by the course instructors. That is, Nabeela did not participate in the *maasi* class as a materialization of different stages of pious subject formation where the instructor and domestic worker-students were hierarchically located in different stages of religious advancement. Rather, her participation was shaped by concerns for her health and employment. Thus, while Al-Huda teachers attempted to lodge the domestic workers within a developmentalist logic of rational pious subject formation, the domestic workers participating in the class found ways to subvert this logic.

It is interesting to note that alongside their discursive positioning as the irrational inferior other, domestic workers also constituted the conditions of possibility especially for the upper class women I met to commit to and engage in the development of their piety. That is, employing domestic workers alleviated women's responsibilities at home and allowed them to pursue their Islamic education. Many women described how participation in Al-Huda required creative time management that allowed them to fulfill their duties at home as wives, mothers, and daughters while they took on formal courses, study circles, or *dawah* activities. For several women, this meant employing the help of domestic workers. Rabia, for example, described how she dealt with the demands on her time after enrolling in the Al-Huda diploma program:

I remember it was very tough for me. That was when I got a new servant because who is going to come home and cook in the afternoon. My husband was very supportive when I told him that I couldn't do it because I was getting so tired and he said okay let's hire someone...You only have 24 hours so you have to somehow

manage these things. It is also that we were lucky that we found good cooks and good people and the kids had no problem – I think this was a blessing from Allah.

Similarly, in my conversations with Zainab, whose struggles to complete the diploma course were exacerbated because of the demands of cohabiting with an extended family of in-laws, she often interjected her thoughts with gratitude for her loyal and reliable domestic workers: “My driver, *mashallah*, he is my right hand”. Domestic workers bringing in refreshments or asking questions about what to cook or clean would often interrupt the interviews I conducted in women’s homes. This would often elicit a remark from many women about how these domestic workers were a godsend or about how it was difficult to find good help.

Although I was not able to speak in private with the domestic workers I encountered to ascertain personal details, the demographics of domestic workers in urban Pakistan would suggest that their ‘assumed’ labour was determined by their ethnic, caste, religious, and linguistic identities. The relegation of certain identities, such as Christian, Hindu, Pathan, Bangladeshi, rural Punjabi and Sindhi, for example, to domestic work is pervasive in urban centres in Pakistan (Shahid, 2010). Moreover, domestic work, although a prevalent form of labour, is not a recognized form of labour in the formal economy and is thus excluded from labour laws that would offer some modicum of rights and protection from exploitation. Al-Huda’s *maasi* class occurs within this context of ubiquitous exploitation of domestic workers amongst the urban upper classes in Pakistan. Speaking to analogous experiences of black women in service work in the United States, Claudia Jones (as cited in Davies, 2008) invokes the metaphor of a “barometer” (p. 39) – an instrument to measure atmospheric pressures – as a way to think about what is revealed about the status of all women through an analysis of the status of black women. She argues for interpreting

the experiences of black women as a measure of the severities of social and political climates in order to gain a deeper understanding of the extent and complexity of systems of oppression. If we are to conceive of the domestic workers in these Al-Huda women's lives as a barometer in this sense, then the ways in which they are located in a relationship of "superexploitation" (Jones, as cited in Davies, 2008, p. 43) is painfully evident. Jones used the term "superexploitation" to refer "to the ways in which black women's labour is assumed; the way they are relegated to service work by all sectors of society, with the complicity of progressives and white women's and labour interests" (Davies, 2008, p. 42). The *maasi* class does little to challenge the social relations that constitute the assumed labour of these women workers. Furthermore, as 'illiterate' women, they are located differently than other students at Al-Huda. This difference operates at several levels in my respondents' constructions of the self as possessors of rational forms of piety. That their "assumed labour" is maintained and, in fact, remains central to the development of many women's piety makes visible the limitations of the domestic workers' inclusion through the *maasi* class.

Together, the conditions of possibility constituted by domestic workers' labour and the developmentalist *dawah* targeted at them illustrate the underlying politics of inclusion and exclusion in my respondents' projects of religiosity. On one hand, the domestic workers' always already assumed labour forms the conditions of possibility for many students and teachers at Al-Huda to develop their piety. On the other, the domestic workers' embodied presence at the Al-Huda centre as students also does the discursive work of the "hypervisible other" (Mohanram, 1999, p. 50) in these Al-Huda women's constructions of the rational, pious self.

In what follows, I draw on interviews and participatory observations with women affiliated with Al-Huda and the Jamaat to suggest that as a process of subject formation, their practices of piety produce a genre of liberal subjectivity that contributes to the solidification of liberal hierarchies and processes of exclusion/inclusion. I first examine the role of scripture and the concomitant emphasis on literacy to map out how rationality is constructed through the centralization of the text in my respondents' understanding of piety. This construction of rationality marginalizes the illiterate classes from my respondents' conceptualization of Islamic piety and the Muslim subject. I then focus on how these women conceptualize and mobilize the Islamic concepts of *biddat* and *shirk* to deem other practices of Islam as irrational and un-Islamic. Their mobilizations of these concepts coalesce with nationalist constructions of, for example the Hindu other, and echo anxieties about the incompleteness of the project of the partition of India (and the supposed separation of Muslims from Hindus). These taxonomies of rationality and irrationality are acutely evident in diasporic discourses of piety where distance from Hindu/India forms the basis of conjuring a better possibility for practicing an 'authentic' form of piety. I then explore how self-perceptions as rational student-subjects of Islam are tied to constructing a "genre" (Wynter in Scott, 2000) of universalism as exemplified in the developmentalist logic of the *maasi* class recounted above. Together the logics of rationality and developmentalism echo similar distinctions made in liberalism. I explore how we can understand these practices of othering as commensurate with liberalism through an analysis of the role of rationality in liberal thought. I argue that the constitutive exclusions, marginalizations and violences produced by constructions of the pious self are

commensurate with liberalism and, in the context of Pakistan, they find refuge in and strengthen one another.

### **Rational Piety: Text-Centrism and Literacy**

*“Qur’an for all. In every heart, in every hand”. (Al-Huda International slogan)*

The centrality of the Quran in my respondents’ envisioning of rational pious subjecthood is implicated in the construction of good and bad Muslims in Pakistan and in the diaspora. In the *maasi* class, for example, Al-Huda students and teachers sought to help their domestic workers’ unlearn their non-textual practices of Islam and teach them how to read the Quran and understand the meaning of the text. Interrogating how the text operates in the discursive production of religiosity is imperative in order to avoid the tendency to reinscribe a homogenized and dehistoricized conceptualization of Islam that assumes an a priori centrality of the Quran (see chapter two). That is to say, the role of the Quran varies in different practices of Islam. As such, keeping in mind the specificity and plurality of Islamic practices, the making of the centrality of the Quran must be read as part of the politics of remaking religious subjectivities. In the case of the women I conducted research with, the foundational role of the Quran is implicated in their politics of representation and their construction of difference. That is, their text-centrism positions the self and other on a singularized trajectory of progress and development with education and literacy as its central ethic. In the discourses of piety of the women I met, their text-centric approach emphasizes and valorizes the form of text (words on paper) and the mechanics of engaging with the text through literacy skills. Although the text as a pedagogical tool operates interconnectedly on multiple registers as form, content, and

sacred object, I elaborate on the mobilization of text as form in line with how it operates in my respondents' discourses of piety where the text's role as something that requires a certain set of skills produces a subject-position shaped by the acquisition and mastery of these skills.

Central to my respondents' notions of piety is the ethic of turning to the text for guidance and reading and comprehending its meaning for the purposes of understanding and practicing how to be better Muslims. Accordingly, literacy skills such as reading and comprehension are pre-requisites in the formation of a rational form of piety for many of the women I interviewed. Rendered as a requisite component of the development of piety, the Quran as text operates as a test for rationality and a standard against which other practices of Islam are measured and denounced. In this sense, the text, as a sign of rationality, is mobilized to set up the vantage point of the self as a rational subject, which, in turn is employed to identify and manage difference.

The necessity of engaging with the Quran in a methodical and literate fashion through Al-Huda and/or the Jamaat emerges as a response to common practices that do not take up the Quran as a text to be read and understood. For many of the literate classes the recitation of the Quran in Arabic is sufficient and individual understanding of the translation is not a necessary step to becoming a good Muslim. Describing her experience with her Quran teacher as a child, Ghazala expressed frustration with the fact that her teacher never knew the meaning of what he was teaching her: "they will recite a number of *ayaats* but the relationship to our lives they wouldn't know because they haven't understood any of it". She went on to contrast this with her first chance encounter with a

home-based Jamaat Quran class when she was visiting her sister's house as an adult. She described this encounter as follows:

I went to the room and I was sitting there and I was listening to [the teacher] and after some of the *ayaats* (verses) she explained I felt like really? Have I ever read the Quran before or is it the first time I am listening to these *ayaats*? Because the way she was explaining it, and it was not only that she read it first in Arabic and gave the translation in Urdu, no. When she told the translation and afterwards related that *ayat* to our practical life [and told us] how to implement it in our practical life...It's been seven years and since then I have been attending this session so regularly.

Similarly, as Aaliya put it "our tragedy is that we haven't read the Quran. Our parents have made us recite it [in Arabic] but we never knew the meaning". Learning the phonetic pronunciation of the Arabic text without understanding its meaning was a common practice of piety for many in the literate middle and upper classes. While Arabic pronunciation and recitation remained an important aspect of piety for the women I met as well, it was insufficient, as Aaliya explained, to recite it without understanding its translation, meaning, and applicability. For many women, as Aaliya put it, the absence of such an engagement with Islam despite having sufficient literacy skills was tragic.

In addition, many women also pointed out the flawed and unproductive treatment of the Quran as a revered holy object, rather than as an accessible manual to structure one's everyday life. Describing a practice common at a Sufi shrine, Romana said,

In Pir Pagaro's castle, there are many rooms and in one of the rooms there is a swing, and people put the Quran on the swing. Whoever rocks the swing, his heart's wishes will be granted – this is the absurd concept that people have. You could put any book on there and rock it. Rocking the Quran doesn't do anything. Reading the Quran is what does it. So instead of rocking it there, take it home, open it and read it.

Romana's characterization of this practice as absurd and irrational pivots on her conviction that a rational approach to the Quran requires one to read it. The slippage between

rationality and reading is one that marginalizes the illiterate from the category of a good Muslim. Interestingly, the word for illiterate or ignorant in Urdu, *jahil*, that Romana and others used several times in our conversations, carries with it associations with pre-Islamic Arabia, which is sometimes referred to as *jahiliyah*, the era of ignorance. The significance of the disenfranchisement of the illiterate, both literal and figurative, from the development of piety is clear when considering it within the context of Pakistan and its ideology of a Muslim nation. That is, the expulsion or rehabilitation of the *jahil* corresponds with and finds legitimacy in grand narratives of Islamic history through the linguistic blurring of *jahil* and *jahiliyah*. For Romana, the realization of an Islamic society would require a move away from *jahil* practices that did not take up the Quran as a text to be opened and read.

Zainab and Shumaila, both teachers and students at Al-Huda, also conveyed their frustration with the way they had encountered and engaged with the Quran in the past. They, respectively, stated:

In my family, Islam was on a shelf. It was like this – in Ramzan we would go and take the book off the shelf and read it speedily and then on the 27th of Ramzan we would finish it and then after that we would forget that we are Muslims and put [the Quran] back on the shelf. (Zainab)

People just wrap up the Quran and make really pretty covers for it and put it on a shelf and on someone's death or a wedding they bring it out and put it on their heads or recite prayers but they don't realize that your entire life and how you are supposed to live it is in there. (Shumaila)

Their critique of Quran-on-the-shelf again draws on a notion of rationality that is equated with reading and understanding the text as opposed to treating it as a holy object. Zainab explained that the practice of only taking the Quran off the shelf for the purposes of recitation on a special holy night was an insufficient practice of piety. She also asserted that she felt that this was a superficial and disingenuous way for her and her family to



sustain their Muslim identity when she referred to their practice of only taking the Quran off the shelf during Ramzan. Correspondingly, Shumaila associated the common practice of making ornate covers to wrap up the Quran with a superficial engagement with Islam. In her comments, she conveyed her frustration with the prevalence of the tradition of bringing the Quran to a wedding or funeral and treating it like a holy object that would endow blessings just by being held over people's heads. Moreover, Shumaila conveyed her astonishment that these practices elide the use of the Quran as a denotative and instructive text for everyday life.

This perception of common Pakistani practices is perhaps best illustrated by how several women articulated their rejection of the common ritual of the *Quran khaani* – a collective reading of the Quran on special occasions. The goal of a *Quran khaani* is to complete the Arabic recitation of an entire Quran collectively in one sitting by a group of people. Typically, those in attendance will take one *siparah* (chapter)<sup>67</sup> of the Quran and read it in Arabic, at times with faulty pronunciation,<sup>68</sup> to themselves without attending to the translation or meaning of what they are reading. Those who read faster get through multiple chapters, slower readers may split one *siparah*, and at times children are also included and are usually given the shortest *siparah*. A common scene towards the end of a *Quran khaani* is when there is only one *siparah* left and one reader is struggling to get through it. At times, another reader will assist them, the two will sit side by side and one will read one page while the other reads the adjacent page to get it done quickly. For most of the women I interviewed, this is a nonsensical practice. As one member of Al-Huda,

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<sup>67</sup> A *Quran khaani* will often use a version of the Quran where each chapter is split into a separate booklet.

<sup>68</sup> Preoccupations with correct Arabic pronunciation became particularly noticeable in the late twentieth century and widespread by the 1990s.

Rabia, put it “Quran is a text. If I take this book and start reading one page and you read the other page, will I be able to make heads or tails of it?” For Rabia, the text is something to be made sense of through reading and comprehension. Shumaila also expressed exasperation with the ritual of the *Quran khaani*: “You are not supposed to just go and recite a couple of things and come home”. In these comments, Shumaila asserts that the recitation of arbitrary parts of the Quran in random order by multiple people without any intent to learn what it means or how it can be applied was not in line with her understanding of what it means to practice Islam. In Shumaila and Rabia’s view, correct engagement via text is structured through the form of a book, that is, through the methodical procession of an individual reading and understanding one page at a time in sequential order. The *Quran khaani* thus represents a practice that by virtue of its collectivity defies the underpinning principle of individual possession of rationality in Al-Huda’s text-centric discourse of piety.

Notably, the Quran’s status as a holy object and the practice of Arabic recitation is present in the discourse of piety of Al-Huda and Jamaat, including for Aaliya, Romana, Zainab, Shumaila, and Rabia, however, they are committed to foregrounding the role of the Quran as a text with deep and complex meaning and directions for the development of piety. As mentioned in previous chapters, for many women, this was a pivotal shift in the way they perceived their relationship to Islam. As Donya put it, “reading the Quran with translation...This is a big big contribution of the Jamaat-e-Islami”. Deviating from practices, such as the ones mentioned above, that have conventionally characterized the extent of relationships to the Quran for many people in the upper literate classes, the women I met regard access to the Quran and the tripartite ability to recite, understand, and apply it as tantamount in becoming a good Muslim. The structure of Al-Huda and Jamaat classes also

reflects this emphasis on the text where the instructor and students go through the Quran line by line perfecting their Arabic recitation, translating each word with attention to grammar, and then engaging in *tafseer* (exegesis) where the instructor provides historical and textual context and they together discern the meaning and contemporary relevance of the passages. For many of the women I interviewed, this centralization of the mastery of the text in the development of piety is an affirmation of their identity as educated and rational women. As Rabia put it, “I thought to myself, I am an educated woman and I have been blessed – my brain and memory power is a lot – so why not read the Quran and understand it”. Rabia’s reflections exemplify how many women mobilize a construction of a rational, intelligent self who is capable of engaging with the content of the Quran. For Rabia, this was also a moment of applying a set of skills that she had learnt for and through other purposes, such as schooling and professional life, but had not applied them to her practices of piety in the past. Using these readily available skills seemed to her like a logical step in the development of her piety. In this sense, Al-Huda’s discourse of a rational and logical engagement with the Quran validated her sense of self and produced a feeling of belonging through an affirmation of her merits.

Across nearly all the interviews I conducted, the purchase of words such as “reason”, “rational”, and “logical” was immediately evident. The pride with which several women described their approach to Islam in this way was an important aspect of how they reconciled their religiosity as rational, modern, authentic, individual and agential. This pedagogical discourse is reminiscent of how Shahnaz Rouse characterizes the historical emergence of women’s education in Pakistan. Rouse argues that women’s education was “part of the process whereby the bourgeoisie would define itself in opposition to its

'others', most notably the working and producing classes, as well as 'tribals'" (95). This, she argued, would work to reinforce the "universalist grounds" that form the means by which the bourgeoisie "would rationalize their rule and socio-political domination over the rest of the population" (Rouse, 95). Similarly, pedagogies of piety are implicated in processes of othering in the service of such agendas as can be seen in the power relations constituting the *maasi* class.

Mapping out the boundaries between rational and irrational practices of Islam also occurs through an invocation and appeal to scientific rationality where the text functions as the "proof" that authorizes engagement in practices of piety. In fact, science is mobilized in multiple ways to legitimize their approach to Islam. Several women would refer to the presence of medical doctors in Al-Huda or the Jamaat's membership as an accolade that illustrates their commensurability with scientific rationality. In my conversations with Zainab, for example, she prefaced much of what she said with references to her "science background": "I was coming from a background of having studied medicine...if you are in a scientific field like I was, you may not believe without proof". Others mentioned that they were drawn to Al-Huda and/or the Jamaat because of their "scientific" approach to religion, referring to how they use the text as "proof". Fatima, for instance, described why she chose Al-Huda over other organizations she explored: "Al-Huda provided solid facts and proofs followed by a verse of the Quran with reference or a strong *hadith* based on the teachings of our Prophet with reference. So when you're answered with answers...right from Allah's book or the *sunnah*, you're convinced". Fatima's comments reflect the value she places on formal academic practices such as strong references and solid facts and proofs. She found the process of learning about Islam in this way convincing because of the way the Quran

and *hadith* were used as evidence to back up claims of how to be a pious Muslim. The use of the Quran as proof also left little room for dissent or disagreement because it was “right from Allah’s book”. For many women, this approach led to a strengthening of their conviction in their practice of piety because of the rationality and credibility they associated with a proof-based pedagogy.

This discursive privileging of rationality is also integral to how many women I met construct and manage difference. As illustrated in the Al-Huda *maasi* class, the absence of engagement with the words of the text structured through literacy allows for the denunciation of popular practices of piety as without any “rhyme or reason” (Rabia). As Sabeen, a volunteer at the Jamaat elaborated:

There is reason to everything and you don’t need to blindly believe in things. There is a reason for everything. You need to know why. Why are we doing this? Why are we practicing Islam? Why are we praying? Why are we covering ourselves? What is the meaning of life? This is what the Quran can tell us.

Sabeen’s intimation that blind belief is the *modus operandi* for prevalent practices of Islam amongst Pakistanis relies on the assumption that the only way one can practice Islam with and for a reason is through an engagement with the Quran as a text. Sabeen sees the Quran as the proof required and the source of the reason why any given practice would be considered Islamic or not. In turn, a reasonable practice of Islam would be one that is rooted in knowledge of why and what it means in terms of piety. As such, for Sabeen, the practice of Islam without denotative reference to the content of the Quran is not a reasonable practice of Islam. Within this logic, the possibility that these practices may draw their logics from other sources of reason is a moot point. Like many of the women I conducted research with, Sabeen projected the absence of reason onto othered Islamic practices after establishing the literate self as in possession of reason. Consequently, a

reasonable and correct practice of Islam can only take place through literate access to the text of the Quran according to these women.

This discourse is foundational in how many women I interviewed censure prevalent practices of Islam, such as those of the domestic workers in the *maasi* class, as un-Islamic. As was made evident in the denunciation of the domestic worker's existing practices of Islam, such as reciting prayers learnt through oral traditions, the role of the text in establishing their own practices of piety as rational was paramount for many women.

### **Taxonomies of Othering: *Biddat*, *Shirk* and the "Imitation *Ummat*"**

*"It's better to be a student than an imitation." (Aaliya)*

In Aaliya's statement above, the opposition of "imitation" and "student" echoes the way many of my respondents' constructed their own subject-position in relation to what they perceived as common practices of piety. This opposition produces a dynamic of progress driven by aspirations towards a more individualistic and rational engagement with Islam and away from the irrationality of "mindless" imitative practices that they believe are contaminated by "cultural baggage". The concept of "imitation" produces hierarchical subject-positions through its dual meaning as the process of copying and as being fake/inauthentic. In relation to the former, for many women I interviewed, the allure of imitating common practices of piety without engaging with them in a learned manner was an example of the damaging effects of culture to the progress of Islam. A rational engagement with Islam would not be imitative in this sense, rather, it would be deliberate and methodical based on what it says in the Quran. The opposition of "imitation" and "student" also indicates an underlying opposition between culture and religion where the

rational practice of religion requires an objective stance free of the subjectivity produced by culture. In the discourse of many women I met, it is only by becoming a “student” (of the text) that one can identify and move away from so-called cultural biases present in prevalent Islamic practices and toward a more rational, authentic and culture-free practice of Islam.

Implicit in this hierarchical opposition is a deep contempt and fear of the ignorance and vulnerability of the *jahil* (illiterate/ignorant) masses. In an impassioned conversation about the state of Islam in Pakistan, Aaliya targeted her frustrations towards “poor” people. She stated:

If you go to any poor person...they don't know [Islam] but they are the ones who are brought out on the streets to do this or that in the name of Islam. They are sheep and goats. They don't know anything. They are ignorant. They are illiterate. They don't know what they are saying, what they are eating, what they are doing. They don't know the meaning of anything let alone Islam.

Aaliya's frustration stemmed in part from recurring images in the media of violent protestors reacting to an attack on Islam, such as the 2012 protests against the YouTube film, *Innocence of Muslims*. For Aaliya, these protestors did not know anything about Islam, yet they came to represent what a commitment to Islam looks like in the news media. She conflated the protestors with the “poor”, whose ignorance seemed like an ontological condition in her comments. The poor, for Aaliya, were not only ignorant of Islam, but their ignorance was evident in every other aspect of their lives – saying, eating, doing. The enormity of their ignorance posits a near impossibility of their salvation. In other words, not only did they not know anything about Islam, but they could not know anything about Islam. Several other women echoed Aaliya's sentiments in their use of various descriptors such as “mindless”, “mob mentality”, “ritualistic”, and “ignorant”, when referring to the

religious practices of this “inscrutable mass” (Mehta, 1999, p. 68) of people. In turn, the Islamic customs and traditions discursively associated with the poor were reduced to animalistic and undiscerning “imitation” of arbitrary practices that did not follow any legitimized form of rationality and certainly not an Islamic one – hence Aaliya’s phrase “imitation *ummat*” (community of Muslims). Rendering the impoverished as an imposturous community of Muslims through allegations of imitation, in both senses of the word, was a powerful discourse in many women’s construction of the rational pious self.

The essentialization of the practices of the majority of the Pakistani population as ‘imitation’ was further reinforced and validated through textual sources in the discourses of many women I met while also conjuring a notion of ‘authenticity’. Many of the women I interviewed categorized prevalent religious practices using the Quranic concepts of *biddat* and *shirk*. As mentioned earlier, *biddat* refers to practices that are ‘innovations’ and are not true to the Quran and *sunnah*, and *shirk* refers to equating someone or something with Allah and therefore challenging the oneness of god. As Fatima, a regular listener at an Al-Huda centre, explained:

The gist of a *hadith* is that anything that is invented in the religion, which was not a teaching of our Prophet, peace be upon him, would be rejected by Allah. What more clear an evidence can we gather that something that is done which was not taught by our Prophet, peace be upon him, we should not do it?

Innovation or invention, in this lexicon, does not connote reformations that contribute to the progress of Islam, rather it refers to invented customs and traditions that are foreign to Islam but are clothed in the guise of Islam. Consequently, categorizing something as *biddat* is part of a project to expel certain practices mired by “cultural baggage” from what is considered to be a movement toward an “authentic” Islam that emerges out of a text-centric discourse of piety.



In a pamphlet titled *Bidah: Innovations in Islam*, given to me by Zainab, it is suggested that the “cure for innovation”, is reinvesting sole authority in the Quran and Sunnah. The pamphlet states:

...true credence should be given to Quran and Sunnah of the holy prophet (p.b.u.h) only. The sayings of all other; regardless of how great an *imam*, *faqih*, *muhaddith*, *mufassir*, scholar, and *muttaqi*<sup>69</sup> he might be; should be judged according to the criterion of the Quran and Sunnah. (“Bidah,” n.d., p. 10)

According to the pamphlet, any authority on Islam can and must be held accountable to the Quran and *sunnah*. Fatima went on to provide some examples of common practices that find no textual support: “when have we been told or taught by our Prophet, peace be upon him, to visit the shrines, wear amulets, do *fateha*<sup>70</sup> over food, hold *milaads*, or even the way we do weddings...it’s sad and its all *biddat*”. As such, the Quran and *sunnah* were used to determine the authenticity and validity of practices or rituals that are being presented as Islamic. Access and ability to read, comprehend, and apply the Quran and *sunnah* is thus essential to avoid *biddat* and *shirk* according to this approach to Islam. Correspondingly, reiterating the mindless conformity driving the presence of *biddat* in the Islamic practices of the illiterate masses, Rabia explained that “all those things are ritual more than religion” – a distinction that is mapped on to the distinction between text-centric (religion) and non-text-centric (ritual/culture) approaches to Islam. Accordingly, for Rabia, the prevalence of *biddat* and *shirk* is a consequence of practices that are not grounded in the text acquiring

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<sup>69</sup> The pamphlet is referring here to the different types of religious authorities in Muslim societies. An *imam* is a religious leader, a *faqih* is an Islamic jurist, *muhaddith* is someone who is well versed in the *hadith*, a *mufassir* is someone who provides or authors *tafseer*, a *muttaqi* is a pious person.

<sup>70</sup> *Fateha* is the practice of blessing food with the recitation of particular verses and then distributing it to others as a form of repentance. The women I met denounced this practice because they argued that it had no basis in scripture.

the status of ritual amongst those who are not willing or able to discern the validity of these practices.

The ways in which *biddat* and *shirk* are mobilized as categories of othering is evident in how some women I interviewed repudiated the celebration of *milaad*. A *milaad* is a devotional gathering dedicated to the Prophet Mohammad and it includes singing *naatein* (hymns), *shaeree* (reciting and free styling poetry), prayer and general discussions about the Prophet Mohammad. For many of the women I interviewed, the *milaad* is *shirk* because it borders on the worship of the Prophet and thus poses a challenge to the oneness of Allah, and it is also *biddat* because it finds no basis in holy texts. As Shumaila put it, “obviously there is no concept of *milaad* in Islam, there is no room for it, there is nothing in the Quran or the *sunnah* for it...if its not there, then why are we doing it?” These sentiments were echoed in Romana’s comments: “We used to have *milaad* or strange antics like *neyaaz*<sup>71</sup> and we used to distribute sweets and fast on some random days. These nonsensical things have been slowly removed. These things are not part of Allah’s commands” (Romana). The lack of textual proof renders the *milaad* an irrational and therefore irredeemably un-Islamic practice. As such, many women were engaged in a process of removing the practice of *milaad* from their communities.

Since nearly all the women I met associated the absence of rationality with the mindless following of custom or an imitative mode of being, I asked women I interviewed where these other “un-Islamic” practices come from. Harkening to nationalist narratives of partition and the Islamic basis of Pakistan’s independence, several women traced the

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<sup>71</sup> *Neyaaz* is the practice of distributing items, such as food or clothing, to others as part of special prayer. Like *fateha*, the women I met denounced this practice because they argued that it lacked scriptural basis.

presence of *biddat* and *shirk* amongst Pakistanis to “cultural baggage” left over from once living amongst Hindus in India. Evidence of these remnants of Hinduism in the cultural and religious fabric of Pakistan was found in a range of practices from visiting shrines of saints to the way weddings are celebrated to common ritualistic gestures. Romana, a student at Al-Huda, expressed her frustration with *biddat* in her community as follows:

Our Muslim *ummah* is being distracted and is going off the path by these little things and are leaving the direction their faith would take them. This is a big thing that is happening and we need to finish it. It is a problem that we are not doing the things that Allah has asked us to and we are spending our time on these other things. These things are mostly things we have gotten from Hinduism...celebrating everything. Just because they celebrate everything we also thought we should celebrate everything? We only have two *eids* to celebrate, that's it.

Romana expressed her frustration with the stubborn presence of normalized un-Islamic micro-practices amongst Pakistani Muslims when she refers to these “little things” that are a “big thing”. Thus far undetected because of their little-ness, these practices pose a great obstacle to the realization of ‘authentic’ Islamic practice in the context of Pakistan for Romana. Furthermore, implicitly appealing to the Islamic virtue of moderation and juxtaposing it with the perceived excesses of Hinduism in her reference to celebrations, Romana delineates the markers of a good Muslim through opposition to Hinduism.

As we spoke further, it was clear that Romana saw this “cultural baggage” as the most pertinent challenge to Islamic reform and revival – a concern echoed by many women I interviewed. Rabia, a graduate and instructor at Al-Huda, referred to a common ritualistic gesture as evidence of the pervasiveness of mindless imitation of Hindu practices. She described the gesture as follows:

When we were in India we lived together with Hindus and that has an impact on our society, on our country...Whatever influences were around them, they started adopting and doing that too because their commitment [to Islamic knowledge] wasn't there. They were brought up with these practices and did not have the

understanding or knowledge of why they were wrong. If you are giving money for charity that's fine, but there is no need to circle it around your head before giving it. That is un-Islamic. How many of us do that? I had to tell my sister too, please, for god's sake, don't do that. She laughed and said she forgets every time. These things have been around for so long. It will take time for it to go away from society.

The common gesture of removing any ill will by circling money around someone's head before giving it to them acquired an insidious meaning as cultural baggage that signaled a sort of infiltration by Hindus every time it was practiced. Rabia's comments are thus marked by a sense of incompleteness or insufficiency of the project of partition in producing an Islamic nation – which for her is evidenced by the presence of such “un-Islamic” micro-practices. As Ayesha, a student at an Al-Huda inspired home-based Quran class, put it:

It's just the status quo that keeps going. What our ancestors did with their eyes closed we think we should keep doing it whether it's right or wrong. [They are] in state of denial. Even if you try to tell people that it's not like this in Islam, then people are ready to fight you.

Rabia and Ayesha's comments draw on a discourse of religious reformation that seeks a systematic repudiation of Indian/Hindu practices, as well as practices associated with India and Hinduism, through for example the Sufi and Barelwi<sup>72</sup> practices of Islam, and thus resonates with nationalist rhetoric that seeks to consolidate a singular Muslim identity. Both of their comments also acknowledge the enormity of the project of unlearning Hindu practices.<sup>73</sup> They are resigned to the idea that it will take some time to change the status quo. Again, both their comments reiterate the notion that these Hindu practices are

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<sup>72</sup> Sufi and Barelwi Islamic movements in South Asia are known for their mystical devotional practices. See Jalal (2000) and Metcalf (2009) for more on the historical development and significance of these movements.

<sup>73</sup> As I discuss later in the chapter, their understandings of Hinduism are limited and homogenizing. For many women, understandings of Hinduism are produced through stereotypes proliferated through popular media (Bollywood, Zee TV etc.), and nationalist rhetoric.

practiced blindly and without any reason because they find no credence in the Quran or *hadith*. The process of completing the project of partition is thus entangled with establishing the authority of the Quran and *hadith* as a guide for how not to be Hindu.

The print literature circulated by and amongst Al-Huda and Jamaat members also carries references that indicate the persisting place of partition in discourses of piety. For instance, the previously mentioned pamphlet also outlines the reasons for the prevalence of *biddat* in Muslim communities:

1. Blindly following the ignorant ways of one's ancestors
2. Exceeding in respect of elders
3. Imitating the rituals of imported, non-Muslim, especially the Hindu culture
4. Disharmony between various religious groups and distortion in their ideologies
5. Lack of knowledge regarding the Sunnah of the holy prophet (p.b.u.h)<sup>74</sup>
6. The misunderstanding that innovation is just a matter of "difference of opinion" ("Bidah," n.d., p. 5)

Echoing the generational anxiety in the reasons for *biddat* implicit in Rabia's conviction that these practices will take time to go away, the pamphlet also implicates previous generations and the concomitant dangers of "respect for elders". The figuration of the elders as repositories of fraught nationalist histories, some of them having pre-dated the partition of India and the independence of Pakistan, constructs an embodied teleology of time and space in the development of piety. Many of the women I interviewed, especially those whose parents were born prior to 1947, cast their parents' practice of Islam in these terms – that is, as not adherent to the text and infected by Hinduism. In this sense, piety acquires a temporality through the nationalist framing of a generation gap. Together, their Hindu proclivities and their status as elders made the elders a formidable obstacle to the realization of an authentic Islamic praxis. Thus, even as the women I interviewed disrupt

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<sup>74</sup> P.b.u.h is an acronym for "peace be upon him", a phrase commonly used after mentioning the Prophet.

the gendered relationships tied to the Pakistani nation-state as discussed in chapter four, there are several ways in which their religious praxis is also commensurate with nationalist discourses of unity and othering.

For example, in the previous chapter, I use the example of *qawwam* to discuss how the religious praxis of the women I conducted research with disrupts dominant nationalist discourses. However, it is important to note the ways in which *qawwam* acquires legitimacy and settles into place as an integral part of piety through multiple and interrelated discursive registers. In addition to being contextualized in relation to the *akhira* and as part of *akhlaaq*, *qawwam* is distinguished in nationalistic and xenophobic terms from women's experiences of oppression, which would often be attributed to remnants of Hinduism. As Shumaila put it, "It's not that men and women aren't equal in Islam, it's more that men and women aren't equal in Pakistani society. I feel like that is the major issue". Shumaila's assertion here is indicative of an underlying critique of the inability of the Pakistani nationalist project to establish an Islamic state and society through her distinction between "Islam" and "Pakistani society". For her, the claim that Islam was not egalitarian was because of the mistaken conflation of Islam and Pakistan. Beenish, a teacher and volunteer at the Jamaat, was more explicit in her critique of the Pakistani state as she attributed the oppression of Pakistani women to a lack of implementation of Islamic rights. She explained:

Women's rights [in Islam] are *alhamdulillah* so well designed that any problem can be addressed through them – these are the basic teachings. We ourselves don't implement these teachings properly. Implementation is the issue here in Pakistan. We know that this is an Islamic state and we know that all these rights are given to women but because there is no implementation, that's why we have such problems. So, I think that if these things were implemented properly, then this propaganda against Islam would have no impact.

Beenish locates the oppression of women in the failure to implement Islamic rights in what is supposedly an Islamic state. In addition to her critique of the Pakistani state, Beenish argues that the impression that Islam is oppressive to women is the result of “propaganda” against Islam and, by extension, that there is a need for women to secure themselves against such misrepresentations that may preempt a fuller engagement with the development of piety for fear of being drawn into an oppressive situation.

In fact, this is something very actively addressed in Al-Huda’s discourse of piety as is evident in one of Farhat Hashmi’s recorded lectures recommended to me by Rabia where she spends much time explaining that nowhere in Islam is a man considered to be better, superior, more valuable or preferred by Allah over a woman (Hashmi, n.d.). Speaking categorically against practices such as female infanticide and the perception of a girl child being a burden, Hashmi explains that first and foremost a female has the same right to life as a male and that these anti-female practices find no support in the Quran or *hadith*. Hashmi’s series of lectures on the topic have been effective in assuaging the discomfort of her audience of educated, middle/upper class women by distinguishing the patriarchal gender relations stemming out of her interpretation of *qawwam* from other patriarchal practices that would be characterized as ignorant cultural practices of the illiterate classes.

Using the example of the *hijab*, Kanwal, a student of a weekly home-based Quran class taught by an Al-Huda graduate, made a distinction between women who were forced to wear it, and those who chose to wear it through the development of their religious consciousness. She explained the difference as follows:

There are definitely oppressed women like when you go to Saudi Arabia you can see that – the way some men treat their women...I don’t wear the *hijab* but there are two kinds of people who wear the *hijab*. One, those who have chosen to wear the *hijab* – these are young girls like your age or a bit older than you who have chosen to

wear *hijab*....and two, those who have been made to wear the *hijab* by their parents. The ones who have chosen to wear the *hijab*, they are the ones who, in my opinion, are really liberated women. Very self-confident, don't care what the world thinks, want to make a statement and they are doing it only for one reason, to please Allah, and that's it. These women are really self-confident.

Kanwal deploys the stereotype of oppressed Saudi women in order to emphasize the agency of women who arrived at the practice of wearing the *hijab* through "choice".

Kanwal's notion of 'choice' is to some extent symptomatic of the ubiquity of liberal ideals of the autonomous individual who is free from coercion and/or the oppressive force of conformity. The 'liberated' status of Kanwal's ideal *hijabi* is thus dually linked to her condition of freedom and her ability to make a conscientious choice.

However, as Saba Mahmood (2005) cautions, an ethic of individual choice does not necessarily reproduce the central assumptions of liberalism. For Mahmood, although the exercise of choice carries with it inflections of liberal individualism, it does not necessarily refer to the valorization of individual will that would be the basis of choice in liberalism. Instead, she argues, the notion of choice must be read within the field of possibilities laid out as part of a discourse of piety. That is to say, "choice is understood not to be an expression of one's will but something one exercises in following the prescribed path to becoming a better Muslim" (Mahmood, 2005, p. 85). While Mahmood's point is salient in terms of teasing out the specificity of meaning accorded to concepts like 'choice' that are often held hostage to liberalism's claims to universalism, I emphasize here the identity produced and affirmed through the deployment of such terms by the women I interviewed. The politics of representation underpinning Kanwal's portrayal of "liberated women", for example, operate through a process of othering that is constitutive of their piety as lived experience. In other words, the comfort drawn from discursive othering of, Saudi women,



Hindus, and the illiterate, is integral to how women submit to *qawwam* while maintaining their self-perception as conscientious, educated and modern women. So, while 'choice' may not follow a strictly liberal form in the practices of piety of the women I interviewed, its signifiatory currency is drawn from its association with liberal modernity.

Several women I met echoed such perceptions of their Islamic praxis and expressed frustration with misperceptions of the status of women in their notions of piety. Ayesha, a student at an Al-Huda inspired home-based Quran class in Mississauga, pointed out that there is a willful ignorance about the aspects of Islam that relate to women. She stated:

Quran gives every single person rights. The wife has these rights, the husband has these rights, children have these rights. Inheritance should be this much for this person and that much for that person. In Pakistan if women only knew of their right of inheritance. People don't give women their rightful part of inheritance. When it comes to that, no one wants to know what Islam says.

So, for Ayesha, it is not only a matter of the Pakistani state and society ignoring what the Quran says, but also that they especially ignore the aspects of Islam that relate to women's rights and entitlements. In line with this critique, Ayesha, like Beenish and Shumaila, contends that Islam is not, strictly speaking, the cause of experiences of gendered oppression. Instead, like many of the women I met, she attributed the oppression of women to un-Islamic practices that have pervaded gender relations amongst Pakistanis.

These un-Islamic practices are typically attributed to either Saudi Arabia, the West or to Hinduism. However, it is interesting to note how the women I interviewed mobilized each of these foreign influences differently. Explaining the reasons for women's experiences of oppression in Pakistan, Ghazala said:

The reason being again, if you don't mind, is that we have lived with Hindus for 900 years. What they used to say about women is that they are just like dust on our shoes. They used to treat women as though she has no right to her life – she is only associated with a man. She has no identity herself. As an individual she is nobody.

This is how Hindus think about women. Mohammad has never beaten a woman. The degree to which Islam protects women, the degree to which Islam has given women status by making her a mother, just look at all the conveniences Allah has provided for women through this. Woman herself doesn't know. Why? They of course weren't going to tell her, and woman herself didn't try to find out. The basic problem in Pakistan is that woman herself doesn't know her rights, what Islam gives. What she is running after is those rights that the West is talking about. See, the West, they never gave any rights to women. They always considered women as a body, as a commodity, as a thing that can be associated with selling. Like it's a creature that is sent to this earth to be humiliated always and is capable of nothing. Whereas, if we look at the history and if we look at the era when the Prophet was ruling and if we look at Medina, the city where actually Islam was being practiced, if we look there, woman is such that a person would be amazed.

For Ghazala, the influence of Hindus is a historic circumstance that poses the threat of oppression to Pakistani women, however, she positions the West as the means through which many women mistakenly think they will find respite from these oppressive Hindu practices. Thus, she instead proposes an informed practice of Islam, where women would know their Islamic rights, as a proven course for women to fight oppression as exemplified in Islamic history. In other words, Ghazala thinks of the West and Islam as contesting solutions – albeit where Islam wins out – to the problem of Hindu oppression. Sabeen also explained how women are navigating the legacy of Hinduism in Pakistan in the fight against gendered oppression:

I think all over the world, women are oppressed. Yes, they are. It doesn't matter where they are living, they are [oppressed] to one degree or another and in Pakistan they are also oppressed. The reason is that we are not following the Islamic way and neither are we following any Western values. We are just in limbo. So we are not getting any kinds of rights. We are not getting the rights that a Western woman has and we don't have the Islamic rights. We are nowhere. So whatever the culture is, it is a culture borrowed from Hindus...whatever we were left with after so many years, thousands of years, and so we have that cultural baggage that I was talking about. It (cultural baggage) is that men can dominate women, they can oppress them, they can force them to stay home. They can do anything they want, they can kill women also...We don't have an Islamic system so out with that, we don't have any western laws and rules and everything so out with that. We have nothing to protect ourselves. That is my perspective of how the world is basically right now.

Echoing Ghazala's argument, Sabeen also posited the West as a competitor to Islam in terms of a solution and located Hinduism as the root of the problem of women's oppression.

Sabeen and Ghazala's characterizations of Western and Islamic laws as mechanisms through which women can gain protection (from Hinduism) rest on several assumptions. Their understanding of the oppression of women was mired within the tensions of tradition and modernity where both Islam and the West were rendered in terms of modernity and Hinduism in terms of tradition. The ontological claims that constituted the Manichean logic of the tradition-modernity binary are evident in how both Sabeen and Ghazala represented Hinduism in Orientalist terms. By homogenizing Hinduism, discursively locating it in the past, and essentializing it as inherently oppressive to women they presented themselves as belonging to modernity. Thus, underpinning the distinction between *qawwam* and oppression was a nationalist narrative of Islamic modernity. While Al-Huda women in particular were ostensibly ambivalent to questions of the nation-state in the sense that they reject the nation-state as a defining feature of their social imaginaries (unlike the Jamaat), the persistent invocation of the Hindu-other is indicative of the hegemony of Pakistan's existential nationalist mythologies of Hindu-Muslim animosity. In addition, this form of othering reaffirms the marginalization of Hindus by covering over the historical presence of Hindu communities in Pakistan and classifying them as foreign in the interest of consolidating Islam as the basis of the nation-state. In contrast to the purportedly Hindu-influenced oppression of women by Pakistani Muslims who do not know any better, the text-centric approach to Islam engendered by the women I met, then, is presented as an alternative pedagogy and method of practicing Islam that has a powerful

claim to authenticity. Developmentalist *dawah* opportunities like the *maasi* class, for instance, are thus as much rendered in terms of saving those women from un-Islamic practices as they are in terms of saving them from Hindu oppression.

### **Diasporic Authenticity**

The discourses of piety propagated by the women I conducted research with in the Pakistani diaspora in the West have been instrumental in further sharpening this notion of cultural baggage and Hindu influence. Distance over time and space presents an opportunity to expunge and renew the practice of Islam for diasporic Pakistani women and detach from Hindu/India. An illustrative example was a conversation I had with Razia, a woman I interviewed in Mississauga, who responded to my upcoming fieldwork trip to Pakistan by saying: “If you want to know about Islam you should speak to women here (in Mississauga)”. Her explanation for this was that “In Pakistan we are living in the past because we are too close to the past. It is right there next to us in India so it is not easy to let it go and move on to Islam”. Razia collapses the temporal and spatial here into a teleological narrative of progress where Islam is simultaneously the basis and the not yet realized telos of the Pakistani nation. Central to her (re)construction of the Muslim subject is a reconfiguration of the way Islam is incorporated into Pakistani national identity, which unsettles it from its rigidified place as an existing identity upon which the demand for Pakistan was made and relocates it temporally and spatially by imagining it as a notion of progress that is intertwined with and reinforced through experiences and narratives of migration.

In other words, insofar as Islam was understood as the ultimate basis for the Pakistani nation in the dominant nationalist narrative, it was conceptualized as a pre-existing component of society - that is, Pakistan is supposed to be an expression of an existing Islamic identity. But through the reconfiguration of the temporality of Islam in the discourse of the nation, the women I met trouble this conceptualization of the nation. This temporal imaginary that simultaneously locates Islam as the past (the foundation) and the future (the not yet) sets in motion a sense of national duty for these women that as Pakistani Muslims there is a need to actively aspire to Islam.<sup>75</sup> Furthermore, the simultaneous location of India as a geographic neighbour and a spectre reflecting the past (and present) of Pakistan produces an intimate enemy, an ever-present and unrelenting threat holding back the progress of the nation toward Islam. Thus, proximity is a problem in both senses – as similarity and space.

The expedited piety of the diaspora is thus enabled through the mitigation of this proximity in the West (read as Judeo-Christian). In a booklet recommended to me by another member of Al-Huda titled *Understanding the Evil of Innovation: Bid'ah* (Ibn Mohar Ali, 2006), Judeo-Christian contexts are considered relatively safe because “their falsehood is evident and less likely to cause us to stray” whereas in the case of those who are submerged in cultures rife with *biddat* “it is more difficult to shift the truth from falsehood”

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<sup>75</sup> Naveeda Khan (2012) characterizes similar processes as “striving” – a notion of “Muslim becoming” that is inherent in the national imaginary of Pakistan. She points to the poetry of one of the so-called founding fathers of Pakistan, Mohammad Iqbal, as evidence of this “tendency” towards becoming rather than being Muslim at the inception of the nation. However, I hesitate to use her formulation in the context of this dissertation because she seems to trace an alternative, but still monolithic and undifferentiated ideology of Pakistan, which is precisely what I am attempting to unpack through the spiritual epistemologies of the women I interviewed. Moreover, her use of the work of Mohammad Iqbal to make this point is also problematic in that, at best, it assumes a literate national populace or, at worst, reproduces the exclusion of the illiterate from the national imaginary.

and they are “more prone to attract us to vanity and that which is pernicious” (p. 57). The West figured prominently but contradictorily in my respondents’ transnational discourse of piety ranging from a knowable Judeo-Christian religious space, to a depraved space of enlightenment-gone-awry, but always a less threatening space because it is relatively culture-free, and therefore *biddat*-free. In the first instance, the characterization of the West as Judeo-Christian situates it within familiar narratives of historic encounters between Islam, Christianity and Judaism – encounters that are relayed in the Quran and *sunnah* and can thus be identified and dealt with in relatively straightforward ways by referring to textual examples. The perceived depravity of the West poses a different set of issues in the diaspora especially in relation to parenting, however, this depravity is seen as a degeneration of Christianity or Judaism, which, interestingly, is less threatening than degeneration (through innovation/*biddat*) within Islam that confuses Islamic identity in far more exhaustive ways. Thus, the West signifies an easier and simpler route to piety for many of the women I interviewed both in Pakistan and the Pakistani diaspora.

Through a migratory spatial displacement, an expedited piety is able to emerge. That is, the diasporic context presents an opportunity for the practice and development of piety that many in the diaspora felt was not possible within Pakistan because of its proximity to India/Hinduism, the related presence of *biddat* and *shirk*, and the social compulsion, temptation, and desire to join in them. At the same time women in the diaspora also expressed a nostalgic longing for Pakistan. For example, another woman I interviewed, Ayesha, referred to the ease with which one can fulfill the Islamic duty of *namaaz* (prayer) and *roza* (fast). Referring to Pakistan, she said:

Everyday you can hear the *azaan* (call for prayers) no matter where you are. In Ramzan, all the restaurants are closed during fasting hours, there are no ads for

food, and people who are not fasting don't eat in public, so you see, its so much easier to fast in a place like Pakistan because people have a lot of respect for these things.

Others brought up examples of not having to worry about whether food is *halal*, not having the temptation of alcohol, and not having to feel awkward in more Islamically appropriate attire when in Pakistan. Dominant nationalist narratives of the creation of Pakistan as a safe place for Muslims reverberate through these expressions of nostalgia and memories of belonging. This affinity for Pakistan is strengthened (if not produced) through diasporic experiences of disorientation and alienation in the West. Noreen, one of the founding members of an Al-Huda study circle in Mississauga, explained:

When I first came to Canada it was just before 9/11 and up until then I was not so interested in learning and practicing Islam in depth. After 9/11 so many people would ask me about Islam and why something like this is allowed in Islam and I didn't know how to answer this question. So I formed this group in order to answer other people's questions - but now I am here because I have my own questions.

However, while many expressed a longing for this context they simultaneously put these very feelings into question by drawing attention to the religious complacency produced through these amenities. Without undermining the importance of a "safe place" for Muslims, many suggested that being in this place can make one a "lazy Muslim". That is, many women in the diaspora worried that Islam is taken as a given because of the construction and dissemination of notions of Islam as part of national identity and therefore, development of Islamic piety in Pakistan has stagnated. Fariha put it this way: "Pakistan is not an Islamic state but it is an Islam-friendly state". So, even as they fondly remember the sounds of the *azaan* in every corner, Pakistan still occupies a contradictory position as the place that both enables and obstructs the development of piety for these women.

### **Developmentalist *Dawah***

*"Give me a good woman and I will give you a good nation." (Beenish)*

*"Give me good mothers and I'll give you good societies." (Ghazala)*

*"Good nations are born in a mother's lap." (Romana)*

Coalescing and relational discourses of the nation infuse how the women I conducted research with position themselves and their pious subject formation in relation to notions of progress. In several interviews I conducted there was a recurring reference to a version of the quotations above, signaling how these women perceived their position and role in society. This gendered role to bear and rear good nations was not only limited to their familial relationships but was also extended outside the home through the Islamic concept of *dawah*, which translates to a call, invitation, appeal, or summons (Mahmood, 2005, p. 57). The practice of *dawah* is a common element in several Islamic groups. For some groups, however, *dawah* is central to their practices of piety. Studies of Muslim women's piety groups in Bangladesh and Egypt, for example, illustrate a preoccupation with *dawah* similar to Al-Huda and the Jamaat. Samia Huq (2014) argues that the *dawah* activities she observed amongst women in Bangladesh "seek to transform both people's inner spiritual lives as well as the public space" through "conventional preaching to friends and family, and...going into the public space in a more thought-out and organized manner" (p. 81). Mahmood (2005) similarly observed that, in the case of the Egyptian women's *da'wa* movement, a range of activities fell under the practice of *da'wa* including "establishing neighbourhood mosques, social welfare organizations, Islamic educational



institutions, and printing presses, as well as urging fellow Muslims toward greater responsibility, either through preaching or personal conversation” (p. 58).

Many of the women I interviewed understood *dawah* as a way of “giving back to the community” (Donya). For Donya, *dawah* was a “responsibility as a Muslim to spread good” and part of her gendered duty to create a strong Islamic society. Farida elaborated:

*Dawah* is *farz* (compulsory responsibility). Allah has said that even if you have learned one line of something, one *ayat*, you have to transfer it to someone else. This is how religion will continue...on the day of judgment you will be asked that you had this knowledge, what did you do with it? And you had the opportunity and the resources...There are cars standing in our driveways. We are going all over the place!

Farida’s understanding of *dawah* implicates her class privilege in multiple ways. For Farida, it is even more egregious that those with resources at their disposal are not utilizing them towards their Islamic duty. The cars standing in her driveway represented an idle resource that could be put to work in the transfer or spread of Islamic knowledge. Farida’s incredulity evinces her perception of the unfortunate lost potential of gaining favour for the afterlife through class privilege. The implications of mobilizing class privilege for *dawah* are clearer when considered in relation to how several women I met imagined their Islamic praxis in terms of rationality. As Ghazala mentioned, another reason why *dawah* is important to many women is to create the conditions for the ongoing maintenance and development of one’s own piety: “If you want to be a pious person, you have to make others just like you. Otherwise, it is very easy to go back to the same thing”. *Dawah*, in the religious praxis of many women I interviewed, was not just about spreading the word of God but also about gaining prospects for the afterlife and homogenizing practices of Islam in order to transform the public space and reduce the possibility of different practices

thwarting the development their own rational forms of piety. Hence, an imperative goal in the practice of *dawah* is to coax others to become like the rational self.

*Dawah* takes various forms in the practices of the women I met based on the receivers of their *dawah*. In particular, I noted a stark difference between the way women spoke about and engaged in *dawah* with their impious counterparts from similar social locations (upper class, literate, urban, English/Urdu speaking) and those from othered social locations (lower class, illiterate, rural, did not speak English, and/or Urdu was not their first language), such as the domestic workers in the *maasi* class. *Dawah* activities targeting the former group of people entailed appeals to rationality and mobilizing a sense of similarity through commensurability with liberal modernity in order to cast their version of piety in palatable terms. Contrastingly, in relation to the latter, their *dawah* took the form of developmentalist activities like the *maasi* class – or what I refer to as ‘developmentalist *dawah*’.

I often found myself in conversations that I suspected were motivated by some women’s *dawah* duties. While I can only venture a guess as to how the women I conducted research with perceived me, I imagine that they located me higher up on a social hierarchy as a diasporic, English-speaking, educated, middle-upper class Pakistani woman. This was particularly evident in several interactions I had with some women affiliated with Al-Huda. I began noticing this perception of me when several women told me the same story about a young, ‘modern’ girl who turned her life around through Al-Huda. The stories went something like this: One day, a girl showed up at one of Dr. Farhat Hashmi’s lectures at an elite hotel venue wearing a sleeveless *kameez* (long shirt that is typically part of a *shalwar kameez* outfit). Some also mentioned that she was wearing capri style pants and no

*dupatta* (long scarf typically worn with *shalwar kameez* used to cover the chest or as an accessory). Her friend had brought her there. The girl was high and/or drunk and/or was a smoker. She stood out in a room full of women who had covered their heads and were wearing full sleeves. The organizers of the event contemplated turning her away because of her inappropriate attire, but then Farhat Hashmi asked that they let her stay and that they not say or do anything to alienate her. The girl was allowed to stay and listened to a life-changing lecture that made her break down and cry. After the lecture, Farhat Hashmi asked that she come speak with her in private. This conversation and experience made this girl a devout and active member of the Al-Huda. She “reverted” to Islam, was rehabilitated from her vices, started covering her head, and stopped wearing sleeveless clothes.

This story, with its references to the elite hotel venue, modern styles of dress, and modern vices, was meant to impress people, like me, who were read as “modern”. Al-Huda’s familiarity with things that are otherwise expected to be absent or ostracized within stereotypical understandings of conservative Islamic circles is a way of signaling their difference and their modernity. Many of the upper class women I interviewed had come to Al-Huda through a lecture or a *daura-e-quran* held at one of the elite country clubs or hotels, such as the Sheraton, in Karachi or Islamabad. Donya explained how the elite venues were used as “a pull, a magnet” and students were drawn to these venues because they were “curious as to how Islam is taught at the Sheraton”. The success of Al-Huda thus lies in part in their deliberate efforts to create classed spaces that would appeal to these women. As Donya explained, several smaller organizations inspired by Al-Huda have been emerging offering “spiritual spas” and retreats. She explained their emergence as follows:

You have these things where they take you to the country club for five days for [Islamic] studies. All [these kinds of things] are there. That is the need of the

day...urban elite women are rich and the husbands are earning and basically they are in kitty parties.

For Donya, Al-Huda, and other similar organizations, are able to appeal to elite women and provide an alternative to how they spend their time. Their inclusivity of the “sleeveless” girl is not only evidence of their ability to relate to the modern woman, but also an endorsement of their Islamic praxis by a member of the upper classes. That this “sleeveless” girl found Al-Huda to be a relatable and credible space affirmed Al-Huda as a modern and progressive phenomenon.

Along similar lines, references to “white converts” who are members of Al-Huda and the Jamaat played a major role in establishing the legitimacy of their religious praxis as modern. Many women would say that white converts are often the “best Muslims” or that they are “even stronger Muslims” than those who are born Muslim. Like the perceived absence of *biddat* in the West discussed earlier, the valorization of white converts is constructed upon underlying assumptions about the objective cultural neutrality of whiteness. White converts are not only valorized because they embraced Islam despite their whiteness, but they are valorized because they embraced Islam through their whiteness. That is, whiteness denotes an elevated form of rational engagement with Islam that is free of the “cultural baggage” that Muslims of colour have to contend with. The very presence of white converts in their membership is operationalized as a means to objectively establish the legitimacy of their religious praxis. Together, references to the “sleeveless” girl, elite hotels and “white converts” indicate the terms upon which *dawah* is directed at the “modern” upper classes. Through the lure of familiarity and similarity, many women I interviewed attempted to engage in *dawah* with those they viewed as their peers in social status.

*Dawah* taking place within these relationships is markedly different from how *dawah* takes place with those considered to be outside the reach of familiarity or the realm of similarity. This disparity was made further evident to me by the experience of being privy to general discussions about the problems in the practice of Islam amongst the “illiterate” lower classes, despite perceptions of me as an impious Muslim of sorts. I was reminded of Chandra Mohanty’s (2003) critique of Western feminism where she draws on Trinh Minh Ha’s critique of Western philosophy: “the ‘conversation of man with man’ is...mainly a conversation of ‘us’ with ‘us’ about ‘them’, of the white man with the white man about the primitive-native man” (p. 75). Being invited into the “us” to have a conversation about “them” indicated to me the perception of a shared privilege and status between me and the women I was having these conversations with. Although this shared status did not preclude me from being subjected to *dawah* activities, it did shape these encounters through a perception of a shared outside – or a shared ‘them’.

The complex processes of othering in the discursive matrix that underpins my respondents’ practices of *dawah* illustrates the ways in which literalist approaches to piety can be entangled with liberal hierarchical dichotomies. The developmentalist approach taken in practices of *dawah* aimed at women and girls from villages, the “illiterate”, and “the poor”, as exemplified by the *maasi* class discussed at the beginning of this chapter, emerge out of this perception of ‘us’ and ‘them’. Furthermore, this approach is formulated at the intersection of their text-centricism and the rejection of custom/tradition and is couched in the language of benevolence, progress, and rationality. Thus, these interactions are occurring on drastically different terms than the *dawah* activities targeted to the upper classes. My respondents’ text-centric understanding of Islam represents one of many ways

of engaging with Islam amongst Pakistanis, yet it structures a hierarchy of Muslimness where the literate are at the top and the illiterate are at the bottom with a gradient of permutations in between. This is not to say that the women I met consider all literate Muslims better than illiterate ones, however, the potentiality of becoming a good Muslim is heightened for the literate since direct, individual readings of holy texts is foundational to their notion of piety. As a result, they construct a hierarchy that marginalizes and demonizes many popular Islamic practices where direct access to Quranic text is immaterial.

### **Mullahs and Alim/as**

The demonization of popular practices is exemplified in the way some women constructed and deployed the trope of the *mullah* and contrast it to the *alim/a* (*alim* for male, *alima* for female). Notably, these women were responding to accusations hurled at them for being “fundamentalists” because of their literalist orthodox take on Islam as mentioned in chapter four. As such, they were also defending themselves against these accusations by redirecting it to others. Moreover, at least one woman I interviewed, Donya, made the effort to unpack the vilification of the *mullah*. When I discussed this issue with Donya she had a careful and nuanced position that was attuned to how the figure of the *mullah* is mobilized in the upper “liberal” classes to homogenize and denounce religiosity. Nevertheless, most other women I interviewed participated in the dissemination of this trope. Even in the context of defending their own practice of Islam, they relied on affirming existing stereotypes of the *mullah* to establish themselves as different. Many of the women I met often traced the prevalence of erroneous ways of engaging with the Quran to the

pervasive influence of “*mullahs*” – note that the plural form of mullah is anglicized by adding an ‘s’, which is indicative of the semantic origins and the circles in which these tropes circulate. The category of the *mullah* is evasive because of its vastness in the sense that it can include anyone (male) who publicly acts as an authority on Islam. However, in the context of Pakistan, it has an inescapable connotation of irrationality and ignorance – a connotation that emerged during the colonial era and became particularly damning during and after the Zia-ul-Haq regime (Khan, 2012).

The *mullah* is thus constructed as a despised and illegitimate figure because of the popularity of his authority despite his dubious knowledge of the Quran. Compounding this portrayal of the *mullah*, many women I interviewed also described *mullahs* as inherently “scary” and “unapproachable” because they are “intolerant”, “extremist”, and “backward”, among other things. Such sensational and homogenized representations of the monstrous *mullah* carry much currency within the social imaginaries of the educated classes in Pakistan and the Pakistani diaspora where the *mullah* becomes a figurative punching bag who can be blamed for almost any social problem arising in Pakistan from child-molestation to terrorism. Underpinning this representation of the *mullah* is a mistrust and disdain for the masses that are in turn depicted as ignorant, lacking autonomy, and, therefore vulnerable to the *mullah’s* dominance.

In contrast, the *alim/a* is represented as a learned scholar, with a worldly outlook and a studied and knowledgeable approach to Islam. To circumvent the damaging influence of *mullahs*, the women I interviewed emphasized the role of the *alim/a* in the development of piety. Ghazala, a regular participant of a home-based Jamaat Quran class, put it this way:

This character of the mullah, in Islam he has no place. *Mullahs* have no place in Islam. But there is a place for *alims*. *Alims* have a place in Islam. *Alims* know about everything happening in the world. If you ask an *alim* to relate something to the Quran, he will be able to comprehend and relate and implement it. He will be able to tell people how to relate it to their lives.

Implicit in Ghazala's statement is the incommensurability between the *mullah* and modernity in the sense that the mullah is not even able to comprehend modern day problems, let alone advise on them. This is not only a failure on the part of the *mullah* to embrace modernity but it is also symptomatic of his inability to master Quranic text and manipulate it with confidence to apply it to modern day life. The *alim/a*, by contrast, masterfully engages Quranic texts and brings it into conversation with modern worldly matters.

A common narrative of this contrast that came up in several interviews and conversations was of how a *mullah* would address the struggles of a working woman. In this narrative, the *mullah*, being inextricably fixed in his "backward" outlook on society, would impulsively forbid women from working altogether, while an *alim/a* would carefully examine the particularities of a woman's struggle and draw on his/her expertise of holy texts to give advice on how a good Muslim woman would manage her circumstances. This narrative pivots on the construction of the *mullah*-extremist as the 'other' who is constitutive of self-presentations of the women I met. For instance, Farida, a teacher and student at an Al-Huda centre, gave the following example of how learning from Al-Huda is different from learning from a *mullah*:

Al-Huda doesn't have an extremist view about things. They believe that you don't have to leave worldly things because it is the world that we have to live in. When we watch *mullahs* we see what their views are and they say things like [women] should stay at home etcetera. Al-Huda is different because they say that [women] can go out also, and you can work also if the circumstances are good for women and the environment is okay.



Distancing the self from the *mullah*-extremist-other affirms Al-Huda's place in modernity in that it shows the congruency of Al-Huda's literalist approach to the Quran with the preferred subject position of a modern worldly Muslim. As mentioned, Al-Huda further demonstrates its investments in portraying a cosmopolitan and global outlook in the deliberate choice of adding the suffix "International" in naming the organization "Al-Huda International". Likening the self with the *alim/a*, further consolidates this position by cashing in on the value placed on the learned, scholarly, cosmopolitan subject of modernity and taking advantage of the legitimacy this affords. Accordingly, the *alim/a* emerges as the agent of progress in the discourse of the women I interviewed.

At the same time, the collapse of the category of the *mullah* with extremists further demonizes *mullahs* and their followers by associating them with an irrational and depoliticized form of violence – an association with exacerbated implications in the context of the hegemony of War on Terror discourse. As Sunera Thobani (2010) points out, in the logic of the War on Terror the enemy other is constructed as an "existential enemy" and not a "political" one (p. 141). This discursive depoliticization of the other renders the enemy as a "mythic, abstract figure" (p. 141) and excludes any possibility of the existence of political contexts – contexts that may implicate the self in disturbing ways that challenge claims of innocence and benevolence. The existential dimension of portrayals of *mullahs*, as exemplified in Ghazala's comments about *mullahs* having no place in Islam, is particularly haunting in the context of this discourse and the corresponding drone warfare in northern Pakistan that elicits tacit and overt support from influential pockets of urban middle and upper class Pakistanis.

It is important to note that in the context of Pakistan, liberal logics of tradition, education, and progress operate on multiple, interrelated levels and the discourses of the women I met are situated within these fraught contexts. First, as a country that is repeatedly and persistently cast in the imperialist idiom of the War on Terror and the “failed state doctrine” (Tahir, 2009), Pakistan figures prominently in global discourses of tradition and progress. Accordingly, Pakistan is vulnerable to imperialist interventions as exemplified by the contemporary drone warfare inflicted by the United States as part of the War on Terror. Second, within Pakistan, the spectre of terrorism and the collapsing of entire communities (Waziristani, Pashtun, Baloch, Afghan refugees) into the category of the terrorist contributed to a polarization of Muslim identities as a result of many Pakistanis attempting to consolidate and demarcate this category further in order to distance themselves from terrorism. This polarization pits the literate modern Muslim as the driver of progress against the illiterate anti-modern (non) Muslim as a regressive and potentially violent force in Pakistan. The overlapping discourses of terrorism and progress and the consequent mapping of good and bad Muslims propels and expands liberal hierarchies and forms of exclusion and marginalization through a literalist Islam.

### **Liberal and Literalist Islam**

As the above discussion illustrates, my respondents’ self-proclaimed literalist engagements with the text implicate their processes of religious subject formation in socio-economic hierarchies and discourses of othering. In this section, I examine how conventional ways of understanding the politics of Islamic groups like Al-Huda and the Jamaat, who take a literalist approach to Islam, make invisible the commensurability and

complicity between literalism and liberalism. I argue that taking into consideration how liberal values are mobilized through the privileging of the literate subject brings literalist groups into conversation with liberalism in significant ways. This requires a shift in focus from how the text operates in definitions of liberal Islam where the practice of progressive/modernist *ijtihad* is privileged as the mechanism through which Islam is reconciled with liberal values. In other words, to explicate the liberal politics of literalist groups I move beyond an analysis of the explicit production/commensuration of liberal values with and through the Quran to an analysis of the implications of subject formation through text-centricism.

This discussion shifts the focus from theorizations of the relationship between Islam and liberalism where the potential for commensurability is primarily identified in terms of interpretive practices that move away from literalism and proceed through *ijtihad* (Jackson, 2011; Kurzman, 1998; Ramadan, 2009). As mentioned in the discussion on Islamic feminism in chapter three, *ijtihad* refers to the systematic, progressive, and contextualized reinterpretation of holy texts. The potential for commensurability between liberal values and Islam is typically situated in this practice because it represents the possibility for reconciliation by taking up Islamic scriptures as flexible texts that are open to interpretation. This approach to Islam is akin to the Islamic modernism of Mohammad Iqbal, Sayyid Ahmad Khan and the Aligarh Movement, or what some have termed “liberal Islam” (Jackson, 2011; Kurzman, 1998) or “secular theology” (Mahmood, 2006, p. 335). The contours of this conceptualization of liberal Islam are further sharpened by its opposition to “traditionalist Islam”, which is defined as committed to upholding historic “Islamic tradition”, and is thereby considered to be in opposition to liberal notions of

progress, and engaged in a more literal interpretation of scripture (Jackson, 2011; Ramadan, 2011). Maulana Maududi and the Jamaat-e-Islami are often given as examples of this approach. The women I conducted research with would be considered “traditionalists” if we were to adhere to this schematic.

The defining moment in this dichotomous mapping of liberal and traditionalist Islam is the rejection of “Islamic tradition” as anti-modern and a subsequent engagement in progressive interpretative practices that reconcile Islam with modernity (imagined as a universal and singular phenomenon). Accordingly, one of the reasons why literalist traditions tend to be left out of definitions of ‘liberal Islam’ is because of their alleged allegiance to upholding ‘Islamic tradition’, where Islamic tradition is narrowly defined as the strict adherence to replicating the historic Islam of the time of the Prophet (Jackson, 2011; Kamrava, 2011; Ramadan, 2009). The perceived inability and unwillingness of literalist traditions to contextualize Islam in relation to modernity because of their resistance to questioning and rejecting ‘tradition’ is taken to be evidence of incommensurability with liberal values. I argue that the rejection of tradition, as is suggested in such definitions of liberal Islam, is not sufficient in and of itself as a liberal value. Rather, the rejection of tradition must be accompanied by a commitment to progress, driven by individual liberty, reason and rationality in order to be considered liberal. In failing to account for the way the notion of “tradition” operates as a function of progress, the distinction between liberal and traditionalist Islam ignores the centrality of the dynamic produced by this duality in liberal political formations. This, in turn, elides an understanding of the significant ways in which liberalism and literalism are entangled.

To briefly elaborate on the dynamic of tradition and progress in liberalism, I turn to critical interventions and critiques in theories of liberalism that explicate its complicity with imperialism. Uday Mehta (1999) suggests that in liberal theory customs and traditions are considered antithetical to progress because they “render reason unnecessary” (Mill, 2009, p. 7) both in their practice and inception. The exercise of mental faculties is preempted for individuals who conform to customs because conformity or “imitation” does not require the exercise of mental faculties. For the prominent liberal theorist John S. Mill (2009), for instance, customs predominantly represent a lack of individual choice and hence are inimical to progress and those who live their lives conforming to customs imbibe an “ape-like...imitation” (p. 71), which effectively reduces individuals to automatons. Moreover, not only does following customs not strengthen the mental faculties and contribute to progress, it actually weakens them according to Mill (2009). Customs, then, are to be rejected as a regressive force in society. Societies where the “despotism of custom is complete” (p. 86) are categorized as “barbaric societies” (p. 88) in Mill’s (2009) theorization, which are then as a whole equivalent to children and are thus not extended individual liberty until they are appropriately civilized. Uday Mehta (1999) has shown how “maturity of mental faculties” (Mill, 2009, p. 12) as a pre-requisite for the extension of individual liberty justifies the exclusion of entire societies by infantilizing them and mobilizes colonialism by positioning the West in paternalistic and benevolent terms with the responsibility to bring these infantilized societies into modernity (Mehta, 1999). Liberalism thus inevitably inaugurates a civilizing mission that in Mill’s day took the form of British imperial expansion and colonialism, but now can be seen and felt in more multifarious, hybrid and dispersed forms through, for example, imperialist wars and

development projects. It is this relationship between tradition/custom and progress that mobilizes a whole set of imperialist imperatives within liberal discourses and is what gives meaning to the rejection of tradition in liberal theory.

Moreover, in a postcolonial context defined by the project of nation-building, liberal secularism holds discursive power as being the only vehicle through which both gender equality and religious pluralism can be guaranteed through its privileging of the autonomous individual (Needham & Rajan, 2007). That is, recourse to the central tenets of liberal political philosophy of freedom and inclusion based on an ontological conception of individual autonomy brings questions of difference into momentary (and illusory) relief through a focus on institutionalizing individual rights. Critics of liberalism argue that this focus on the individual demarcates inclusion, democratic franchise, and freedoms based on a foundational exclusion that emerges out of the pre-requisite of individual possession of autonomous rationality (Mehta, 1999; Mohanram, 1999; Spivak, 1999). That is to say, the individual subject of liberalism must be in possession of rationality in order to receive individual liberal rights and freedoms.

For Radhika Mohanram (1999), the individuality of the liberal subject is inextricably tied to the separation of the mind and the body. In her exploration of articulations of the liberal body Mohanram argues that the hierarchical distinction made between the static body and the progressive consciousness enables and depends upon the visibility and representation of marked, othered bodies. While the liberal body is achieved through a hierarchical separation between the mind and body, the othered body is only ever perceived or represented. This is because this perception is constituted through the process of “the body as materiality with its own logic and agency [getting] left behind

within static space, a punctuation mark in the maturation and socialization process of the [liberal] subject” (Mohanram, 1999, p. 25). The material body is thus expunged from the ideal liberal body and then brought back in through representation in the form of the hypervisible, different, and inferior Other. For Mohanram, the way the othered body figures is always tied to an external referent, that is, the ideal liberal body – or in the case of the women I met, the rational pious body. The domestic workers in the *maasi* class, then, constitute this hypervisible body as can be seen in how the scope of their affect was reduced to a bodily response that has not yet developed to maturation through the enactments of the rational mind. Moreover, recall how my respondents’ had to contend with their embodied practices of veiling being conflated with how a *maasi* or women from the lower classes would cover themselves. For some women I met, this conflation was offensive because they felt that their practices of veiling were different from the *maasi* and lower class women because their practice came out of a rational engagement with Islam and not the bodily needs of a worker in transit. This was also clear in the way these embodiments manifested physically – the distinction between what the forms of covering looked like signaled the level of rationality associated with the practice. The hierarchical relationship between the mind and the body articulated through the separation of the mind and the body is thus a significant and formative component of my respondents’ Islamic discourse.

Attending to these features of liberalism makes visible the implications, expanse and shifting contours of ‘liberal Islam’ in Pakistan. The earlier discussion about my respondents’ discourses and practices of othering unpacks and decentres the conventional association between liberalism and *ijtihad* – and the related liberal fetishization of

“moderate” Muslims – in order to enable a thicker description and critique of liberalism by opening up an epistemological space for considering “literalist” or “traditionalist” Muslim groups as sites that are complicit in processes of subject formation that are complicit with liberal social hierarchies. The commensurability of literalism and liberalism is evident in the processes of othering complicit in my respondents’ modes of subject formation and the social relations that are constitutive of and constituted by their practices of piety. I use the language of commensurability and co-production here so as not to suggest that these Islamic formations are a linear derivation from liberalism, and at the same time to move away from a futile conversation on their degree of authenticity and distinctness. Thus, as an analytical framing, co-production does not presume a priori distinctness and foregrounds relationality and fluidity (Mongia 2007). As such, my respondents’ complicity in social relations of power is made evident through the authorizing discourses they mobilized to establish their positionality as rational subjects of Islam. In particular, overlapping authorizing discourses of rationality/progress, text-centricism, and developmentalism illustrate how these women’s processes of pious subject formation are complicit in reifying liberal trajectories of progress. The distinction between liberal and traditionalist Islam cannot be made based on the content of their interpretations of holy texts, rather, liberalism is more fruitfully gauged by the mechanics of how holy texts are engaged and the subject-positions these mechanisms produce.

## **Conclusion**

While it is important to note that these women’s call to rationality has given way to productive possibilities in terms of dismantling the Pakistani state’s discourses of Islam



and disrupting and reconfiguring patriarchal relationships in their homes and communities (see chapters three and four), it has clearly also been constituted by and is constitutive of hierarchical relations of power. The centrality of the text in my respondents' literalist Islam mobilizes a discourse of rationality that privileges the literate student-subject as the ultimate model for modern pious subject formation. By foregrounding the text and literacy in the development of piety, the women I met construct an elite and exclusive practice of Islam that marginalizes the 'illiterate' and dismisses practices of Islam that do not centralize the text. As mentioned, these processes of pious subject formation are also co-imblicated in processes of nationalist subject formation in complex and contradictory ways. The marking of difference in practices of Islam along the lines of religion and culture draw on nationalist xenophobic discourses that construct Hinduism and the Hindu as the foreign other. This same distinction between religion and culture is mobilized to demonize *mullahs* as extremist others and their followers as mindless 'sheep'. *Dawah* taking place within and through these processes of othering, then, is part of constructions of the self as a rational and modern pious subject. Thus, as a process of subject formation that mobilizes mind/body, rational/irrational, and tradition/modernity as foundational binaries, my respondents' literalist approach to piety constructs its own hierarchical structures that bring it into complicity with liberalism.

## Conclusion

By way of conclusion, I recount two anecdotes of interactions I had with other academics in relation to my research. I received an email from a filmmaker who wanted to produce a documentary film about women and Islam for her graduate thesis. She told me that she was interested in finding out more about women “extremists”, women who perhaps would be part of or in support of Al-Qaeda or the Islamic State of Iraq and Levant (ISIL). She thought that Al-Huda women would fit this description. I asked her why she thought she would find “extremist” women at Al-Huda. She retorted, “how are they not extremists? They wear the *niqab* don’t they?” When describing my dissertation research to other academics I am often met with questions and comments that stem from Islamophobic discourses of Muslim women. What is most surprising is that many of these academics are respected for their feminist and anti-racist work and, indeed, many of them have influenced my analytical frameworks. One such professor in Canada responded to my synopsis of my dissertation research with much enthusiasm. She went on to tell me about a talk she had heard about women who wear the *niqab* and asked me to guess where I thought most women who wear the *niqab* in Canada were born. She then exclaimed, “can you believe that most of them are born here in Canada?” The conversation then took an even more disturbing turn as she went on to elaborate on how she never knows how to engage with students in her courses who wear the *niqab* and that after having attended this talk, she feels more comfortable around them.

While there is much to unpack in these anecdotes, I recount these recent encounters to highlight the academic context in which this dissertation was produced, where popular Islamophobic discourses persist in subtle and not so subtle ways and continue to shape

how Muslim women are understood not only in knowledge production but in everyday academic interactions. For instance, in each of the interactions mentioned above, practices of veiling and especially the *niqab* figure as the pivotal feature for defining women who wear the *niqab* and for determining how to interact with them. Moreover, in these interactions, the *niqab* figures as an over determined symbol that conveys a whole gamut of information about these women – where they were born, their politics, their social skills. That Muslim women’s public displays of piety such as the *niqab* continue to be perceived as evidence of irreconcilable difference demonstrates the persistence of Islamophobic processes of othering shaped by the normative secularity of academic spaces.

The persistence of these reductive and essentialist understandings may be why many scholars of Islam and Muslim women, such as the proponents of Islamic feminism discussed in chapter three, tend to frame analyses of Muslim women through secular epistemological frameworks in an attempt to prove that these women and their practices of piety can be reconciled with secular modernity. However, this tendency often results in explaining away practices of piety by reducing them to social, political, or economic motivations. For instance, veiling is often explained as a form of socio-economically determined patriarchal oppression, or an embodied symbol of nationalist identity, or a form of resistance to Western materialism. At times, in an effort to combat Islamophobic discourses about Muslim women, these characterizations empty these practices of piety of the sacred in order to redeem them as intelligible subjects of secular modernity.

In this dissertation, I build on these efforts to combat Islamophobic forms of knowledge production by deepening understandings of Muslim women’s processes of pious subject making. I do this by taking up the spiritual as epistemological and by taking

the sacred seriously when the women I met with explained how they practice Islam and what shapes their various practices of piety. By taking up the spiritual as epistemological, this analysis contributes to unsettling the normativity of discursively colonized categories of analysis that reproduce Islamophobic analytical frameworks when mobilized in relation to Muslim women. This epistemological framework further produces an analysis of women engaged in developing their piety that does not confine them to the referent of the gendered Muslim citizen-subject or the Muslim feminist subject. In other words, in this dissertation, their relationships with Islam are not just understood in terms defined by religio-nationalist or secular feminist projects and discourses. Rather, I critically analyze my respondents' Islamic subjectivities as entangled with, but not confined by, these discourses. This not only permits a better understanding of how they give meaning to their practices of piety, but it also enables an analysis of their complicities in structures of power and discourses of exclusion.

Working through women's conceptualizations of *qawwam*, which is often taken up as irrefutable evidence of women's subjugation in Islam, I argued against a reductive understanding of women's belief in this concept as indicative of submission to patriarchal oppression. Instead, relying on how the women I interviewed explained how they understood and inhabit *qawwam*, I maintained that it is best understood in relation to the *akhira* as a divine system of rights and responsibilities that is inhabited and negotiated in multiple and relational ways. The example of how women conceptualize *qawwam* brings into focus the trappings of secular epistemological frameworks that would fail to factor in the sacred dimensions of what it means for women to inhabit the *qawwam* of the men in their lives. Accounting for the sacred dimension of *qawwam*, as per how several women I

met understood and inhabited it, complicates normative readings of signs of patriarchy. That is, for example, a sexual division of labour or adherence to strict gender roles is not in and of itself evidence of patriarchal oppression.

The secularizing impulse in knowledge production about Muslim women extends beyond the academy and can be seen in particularly acute ways in popular representations of Muslim women. For instance, the need or desire to normalize Muslim women by effacing piety is evident in the recent surge in representations of fictional Muslim women characters in popular comic books and animated series such as Ms. Marvel, Bloody Nasreen, and Burka Avenger. The central character and hero in each of these productions is a Pakistani Muslim woman who fights villains using her superpowers, street smarts, and/or physical prowess. But, as in the case of Malala Yousafzai, they are represented as not particularly pious or their piety is represented as parenthetical to their heroism. Although these representations are a welcomed counter narrative in the context of popular cultures that seem to be unable or unwilling to see Muslim women as anything but oppressed, the secularizing impulse remains. That is, in their attempts to provide an alternative image, these cultural productions represent Muslim women as empowered because of their secularity. These representations reinforce the problematic notion that Muslim women's agency can only be recognized or achieved through secularism.

In this dissertation I also argue that to understand the spiritual as epistemological not only produces a framework that elucidates the complexity of Muslim women's subjectivities, but it is also integral to a robust understanding of complicities in relations of power and forms of othering. Take, for example, the ways in which the women I interviewed position themselves as the rational subject of Islam. This aspect of their self-

presentation has been an effective tool for dismantling religio-nationalist constructions of the ideal Muslim woman and for combating the Islamophobia they encounter. However, the authorizing discourse of rationality also furnishes their processes of pious subject formation with dynamics of power that manifest in *dawah* activities such as the *maasi* class. Their emphasis on the skills and ability to read, understand and apply holy texts produces a hierarchal notion of piety that marginalizes or excludes the illiterate from the category of a good Muslim. *Dawah* taking place within and through these processes of pious subject formation then is constitutive of and constituted by processes of othering.

While the women I interviewed focused their *dawah* activities on Pakistani Muslim communities, they have also had an impact beyond these communities through, for example, welfare activities targeted at Christian and Hindu minorities in Pakistan, outreach in the Somali community in Canada, and missionary work in the Caribbean. These *dawah* activities are shaped by how race and caste shape conceptualizations of the Pakistani Christian and Hindu other, and Caribbean and black Muslims. Tracing how constructions of the pious self, and concomitant processes of othering, manifest in the context of these relationships would further enhance understandings of the complicities of piety in articulations of difference and forms of exclusion and marginalization. Analytical openings produced through de-centering secular epistemological frameworks enable the foregrounding of such nuances of Muslim women's subjectivity.

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