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# Our Young Muslim Women, Willfulness, and the Honor Crime

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## Abstract

In this paper I suggest that Muslim women's emotional and affective relation to 'culture', 'honor' and Islam, often evident in transgressive acts but also attributed to them to serve other interests, becomes elided in feminist rhetorical and discursive struggles over the interrelationship between colonialism, Islam, gender and culture in existing scholarship on 'the honor crime.' As a Pakistani–Canadian Muslim woman, I draw from experiences in my own classes to reflect on young Muslim women's emotional responses to cultural and honor-related regulation. Conceptualizing Canada and Pakistan as culturally, politically and affectively entangled transnational sites, I consider a strategy to validate the emotions of my students in Toronto by describing, sharing and theorizing the story of young Pakistani Muslim women's disruptive acts, as demonstrated in Aurat (Women's) March. I draw on Sarah Ahmed's concept of willfulness as one possible strategy for young Muslim women to understand their own – and other Muslim women's – transgressive desires, emotions and acts, which may run counter to identitarian constructs of Muslim/Western, Islamic/unIslamic, good/bad women. In doing so, this paper draws upon, but also diverges from, postcolonial and critical feminist approaches that have responded variously to the dilemma of confronting honor-related violence against Muslim women, which is (always) intersected by colonialism, racism and imperialism.

**Keywords:** Muslim women, feminism, honor, Aurat March, Willfulness

## Introduction

This paper arises from my interactions with young Muslim women's feminist collectives in Toronto; collectives that confront family and community-based violence by providing avenues for creative, artistic and cultural expression to young Muslim and South Asian women.<sup>1</sup> I seek out and invite such groups to visit my classes on Women and Islam in an attempt to expand expressive spaces for young Muslim women and men – especially for those who identify as trans- and non-normative genders. In my discussions with these groups, as well as with the students in my classes, I became aware of a deeply felt anguish to remember and grieve the young Muslim women victims of what is often represented by the term 'honor killing.' Most recent memories include a Toronto school girl, Aqsa Pervez, who was murdered by her brother in 2007 (R. V. Muhammad Manzour Parvez, 2010), and the Shafia sisters, who were killed by their parents in Montreal in 2012 (CTVNews.ca Staff, 2012). Honor killing falls under the umbrella term of 'the honor crime,' which is used in this paper to refer to all types of violence – symbolic, emotional and representational, as well as physical – inflicted on women and other-gendered subjects, who are seen to be culturally deviant. Owing to their heightened awareness of Islamophobia and antiracism, validated by the course materials and their own lived experiences, students in my course were also conscious that their pain could be easily appropriated in the interest of anti-Muslim racism, Islamophobia and White nationalism. It seems that grieving their compeers would be a betrayal of family, community, culture, and faith – a willful assertion of feminism and women's gender loyalty.

Cultural and creative projects aimed at expressing young women's resistance, outrage and self-affirmation provide an alternative to the rights-based approaches that critical feminists distrust – justifiably – for their potential to be interpreted as calls for intensified state and societal intervention into the lives of racialized families and communities in the post-9/11 era. Yet, it is rare to find these affective responses and emotions taken up productively by postcolonial and critical feminist literature on the honor crime. To locate more emotionally validating discussions about the experiences of family/honor-related violence, I turn to Pakistan, indeed northern and western

regions of South Asia, where the anguish of such violence is a prominent theme in feminist literature, poetry, song, Islamic mysticism and folklore (see, for example, Ali, 2001; Anantharam 2012; Jalil, 2014; Dawood, 2009, 2012; Shah, 2016).

Much postcolonial and transnational feminist literature, that critical Muslim feminists, including myself, regard as essential reading for honor-related gender oppression, seeks to restrain rather than to liberate the affective potential for racialized women in engaging family/community-based violence. In their understandable concern for the emotive potential of the honor crime to bolster redemptive discourses about racialized and marginalized women – as insightfully theorized by Razack (2004, 2007) – and in their efforts to shut down sensationalist representations of non-Western cultures, much feminist scholarship also enjoins on Muslim women to rein in their own affective responses, unless these vindicate women’s obligations to family and religious community.<sup>2</sup> However, as I have argued elsewhere (Jamal, 2015), these otherwise important strategies to speak truth to the power of Western imperialism – framed as they are, in terms of a homogenous and undifferentiated religious or ethnic community against the hegemonic state – leave little space for the discussion of ambivalent subjectivities for Muslim women. Indeed the ‘State versus Muslim community’ discourse inadvertently increases the emotional burden of many diasporic and transnational lives, which are lived within opposing discourses, desires and emotions that are uneasily contained within identitarian subjectivities, such as gender, race, class, culture, and Islam, Western or secular life (Dadi, 2006, Khan, 1995; Khan, 2018; Zine, 2008). It inhibits discussion of the disparate personal, social, leisure and consumption and professional practices of many diasporic individuals and groups, which are sustained by a complex web of intersecting and contradictory attachments, including national, political, economic, professional, religious, linguistic, ethnic, and ‘Americanizing’ references (Dadi, 2006, p. 44).

The questions I ask and attempt to answer in this paper are not new, but their salience increases every time women and girls in Canada and Pakistan have to confront discourses of honor and culture whose logic culminates in the violence of honor killing or murders of women by their

families: How do we open a space for 'feeling,' in its wholeness, the violence and injustice perpetrated on women and girls in the name of 'honor,' ranging from mundane practices of bodily control to murder, without sustaining the claims of imperialist feminism and colonialist constructions of Muslim and Islam? How do we celebrate the audacity of women and other-gendered subjects whose real or perceived transgressions perform the political-social work of contesting patriarchal and hegemonic notions of religion, culture and community?

I suggest that transnational feminist contribution to the contemporary discussion of the issue of honor, culture and family/community-based violence – encapsulated by the term 'honor crime' – may be considerably expanded and deepened through interventions that validate the complex and contradictory emotional and political responses of many young South Asian Muslim women. Such a re-presentation of the honor crime must negotiate a density of emotions, including hegemonic notions of compassion mobilized by the trope of a 'victim' thwarted of their rights; the normative appeal of the self-denying gendered agent dedicated to religion and community; and the inspirational possibilities of the self-seeking subject of culturally transgressive desires. I find Sarah Ahmed's concept of Willfulness useful to recognize the transgressive woman, and other-gendered subjects, as sites of agency, desire and courage. Through a complex genealogical and phenomenological examination of the heteronormative autonomous Subject, Ahmed establishes that the masculinist Will, when encountered in its non-normative mode, is seen to be Willful. As opposed to the masculine Will, which indicates self-mastery and order, Willfulness denotes deficiency and disorder. It is a particularly useful concept for this paper, since it is frequently used in South Asian courts, and in public discourse, to identify some women as Willful girls and daughters – especially those who assert their own rights in bodily performance, sexual desire or selection of marital partners (Jamal, 2006).

As an example of the possibilities of Willfulness as a theoretical and affective re-conceptualizing of the honor crime, I turn to feminist projects and movements in Pakistan, which – along with India and Afghanistan – records the world's largest number of deaths annually attributed to the honor crime, as well as ongoing everyday forms of violence against young women

(Office of the Chairman, n.d.; Thomas, et al., 2011). New movements of young Pakistani feminists, under the umbrella 'Aurat March' (Women's March), expressed through creative and outrageous acts directed towards their families, communities and society – not simply the state or legal system – may be empowering for diasporic young Muslim women in Canada, where Pakistanis maintain vibrant and ongoing cultural, political and social connections in the diaspora and with their home country.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, bringing Aurat March and the claims of young Pakistani feminists to our classes and other forums may resonate among those Muslim women who resist the moral regulation and bodily control of women and girls, which happens mostly through appeals to impoverished notions of 'culture, honor and community,' and sterile understandings of Islam. Taking this argument further means that the sentiments of resentful young South Asian feminists in Toronto, who seek to center and highlight targets of honor killings through creative memorializing, may be productively re-inscribed by the outrageous acts of young feminists in Pakistan, who challenge, mock, and confront patriarchal cultural control of their lives and their bodies and celebrate the bodies of subject-victims of honor crimes (Azeem, 2020; Khatri, 2019; Rehman, 2017).

In the following sections I will attempt to theorize an approach to honor/culture-related violence through a transnational affectivity, which builds on, and diverges from, postcolonial critical approaches. I review some critical scholarly attempts to define and explain the concept/construct of honor killing, and present my unease with some otherwise useful feminist representations of the honor crime. Finally, I will present an example of Willfulness through a discussion of Aurat March.

### **Emotions/affects and Activism**

This paper is an exploratory attempt to counterpoise the emotions/affects of many young Muslim women to postcolonial and transnational feminist concerns about discourses, subject formation, and reflexivity. I use the terms 'emotion' and 'affect' interchangeably to avoid the dangers of a constructed opposition between body and mind, internal and external, and subjective

versus objective. However, I am aware of the important interdisciplinary attempts to distinguish and theorize the relationship between these concepts.<sup>4</sup> My approach to emotions, affect, and subjectivity is informed by an interest in the inclusionary and emancipatory potential of emotions, which affect, and are affected by, individual and collective subjects – especially those who are racialized and diasporic. This approach is enabled by scholarship that has theorized the analytical significance of affect, the role of emotions, and the relationship between affect and subjectivity for the political life of communities (for examples, see Ahmed 2014a, 2014b; Gopinath, 2005; Lara, et al., 2017). Their insights suggest that unreflexive, emotion-based acts may generate a politics of affect within and across bodies, physical and virtual spaces, national borders, and given or embraced identities.<sup>5</sup> Particularly interesting are the attempts to reconcile the supposed opposition of ‘affect’ as pre-cognitive and embodied, versus ‘subjectivity’ as discursively constructed, by bringing together phenomenological approaches to emotions with poststructuralist notions of discursively constructed power relations. Thus, my project seeks to highlight the emotionality of the honor crime, without abandoning postcolonial feminists’ concerns for feminist reflexivity about the unequal power relations of knowledge production between First World and Third World feminisms. Indeed, this impulse is traceable in the tension between a reflexive analysis of discursive subject construction and emotions in the works of many feminists cited above. For example, Razack and Abu-Lughod frequently refer to the emotional power of discourses to construct hegemonic feminist subjects desirous of ‘saving’ other women. Further, the emotional power of colonial and modernizing discourses of nation, community, and culture have always concerned feminist scholars in their postcolonial investigations of gendered subjectivities.

Engaging contemporary sociological and feminist attempts to theorize emotions, feelings, and sentiments – not as psychological, but as social and cultural – the task for feminists becomes to explicate the effects of emotions and affects on individual and collective bodies, and the helpful or harmful work that bodies can do with emotions.<sup>6</sup> Sara Ahmed’s (2014a) concept of Willfulness expedites a way to think about the emotionally charged relationship among ‘willing’ women who uphold normative cultural, religious, or secular standards in their families, society, and community;

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those that are diagnosed as ‘Willful’ or ‘unwilling’ to uphold norms, and who are therefore worthy of violence and exclusion; and those that embrace the charge of ‘Willfulness’ as a feminist project. Drawing attention to the gendered and, perhaps, sexualized meaning of willfulness in the literary and philosophical traditions of the English language, Ahmed (2014a) shares a typical definition of willfulness: “asserting or disposed to assert one’s own will against persuasion, instruction, or command; governed by will without regard to reason; determined to take one’s own way; obstinately self-willed or perverse” (Ahmed, 2014a, p.4). In dialogue with postcolonial, poststructuralist, Foucauldian and antiracist feminists, Ahmed’s account of Willfulness as a style of politics, a pedagogy, and “a struggle to exist or to transform an existence” is particularly useful for thinking about the honor crime (Ahmed, 2014a, p.133).

Emphasizing that Willfulness must be understood as a political style or mode of politics, rather than a political position or a project – i.e., fixed on a specific goal or outcome – and that Willfulness can often be complicit with diverse desires, Ahmed emphasizes the comforting aspects of performative politics. She points to demonstrations, protests, and rallies as places of respite, and encourages the idea of ‘bodies in alliance,’ drawing on the ideas of Judith Butler (2011), who has suggested the possibility of generating feminist publics that may not conform to institutions and nations. Describing willfulness as a kind of ‘world creating,’ Ahmed (2014a, p.169) says:

Willful subjects can recognize each other, can find each other, and create spaces of relief, spaces that might be breathing spaces, spaces in which we can be inventive... There can be joy in creating worlds out of the broken pieces of our dwelling spaces: we can not only share our willfulness stories, but pick up some of the pieces too. (Ahmed 2014a, p.169)

It is Ahmed’s emphasis on performative, emotional and imaginative possibilities of this concept that makes Willfulness appropriate for thinking about longstanding feminist practices related to culture, honor, gender, and the honor crime in Pakistan. Willfulness, as an inventive way of creating spaces of comfort and relief, is resonant with modes of dissent that are characteristic of poets, artists, and other performative entities in South Asia. Willfulness is a political style

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associated with keepers of a tradition of mystical and shrine-based Islam against religious orthodoxy; it is also a rhetorical strategy for many who recognize themselves as inheritors of genealogies of dissent towards imposed constructs of gender, community and nation. The willful woman or girl who refuses to abide by patriarchal gender and class prescriptions is a significant trope in the literature by feminist members of the Progressive Writers' Movement of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century in South Asia. In the 1990s, Pakistani feminists Fehmida Riaz and Kishwar Naheed castigated the anti-women and oppressive agenda of the military dictator General Zia ul Haq through their well-cited poems, such as 'Stoning,' and 'Hum gunahgaar auraten' ('We sinful women'). In the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, these feminists mocked the Taliban and extremist Hindu nationalism in their poems 'Wo jo bachiyon se bhi dar gaye' ('They, who got scared by young girls') and 'Tum bilkul ham jaise nikle' ('You turned out to be just like us') (Ahmed, 1991; Anantharam, 2009, 2012; Images Staff, 2018; Jalil, 2014; Naheed, n.d.). In the present moment, the provocative acts, actions and slogans of young feminists carve out attention-seeking spaces on social media and in the national space through a provocative form of politics that penetrates the moral and cultural core of society.

There are more reasons to find Ahmed's conceptualization of Willfulness apt in relation to feminism and 'the feminist' in Pakistan. First, Ahmed points out that Willfulness is a kind of diagnosis, which is usually applied to female subjects. Indeed, in the public discourse in Pakistan, the increased and intensified control and restriction of women's conduct, mobility, and embodied practices, tends to be overwhelmingly framed within a perception of increasing social immorality in which control of women's sexuality is considered imperative. This is emphasized in a study by Shirkat Gah (Ali, 2001), a Lahore-based transnational women's research and advocacy organization that has played a prominent role in Pakistani feminists' struggle against honor-related violence:

Essentially [in reference to honor-related violence], the conduct of a woman is to be regulated and judged by men. If she transgresses the boundaries, she dishonours them and is punished for it. The definition of the conduct that might affect a man's or his community's honour, however, has steadily enlarged its scope beyond perceived or proven

adultery to encompass virtually any autonomous decision or action on the part of a woman that affects her social or sexual existence. (Ali, 2001, p.8)

The Shirkat Gah study notes a discursive shift in the concept of 'honor.' This customary notion has been de-linked from its original cultural and social context where, as it has been argued, such systems exist to encourage and maintain wider systems of morality and ideal performance (Abu-Lughod, 2011, p.21). Indeed, Shirkat Gah argues that the traditional notions of honor related to tribal and cultural traditions have become 'corrupted,' such that "Prevalent across Pakistan, honour killings are taking place both in the tribal interior of the country as well as in its more 'modern' urban centres." (Ali, 2001, p.8)

Willfulness is a complex and difficult term, whose meaning, in legal terms, depends on the context in which it occurs. Willfulness is also a notion that is internally contradictory; as Ahmed shows, it is at the same time a diagnosis of what afflicts an individual or a body (i.e., not internal to it), but also a charge of calculated intent – something within the body. Like the charge of 'willful default,' perceived or actual acts of honor-related transgression have become imbued with intentionality and knowledge of consequences in Pakistan so that violence against certain bodies, such as a 'dishonorable' daughter, a 'blasphemer,' or a non-heteronormative gender, can often appear to be extenuating (Jamal, 2015).

Theorizing emotions and affects as a form of transnationality provides an alternative to the stultifying discursive legacies of colonial, cultural and economic dominance that link Canada and Pakistan as immigrant-sending and immigrant-receiving states. This paper recognizes this relationship, also as affectively and emotionally entangled states of affairs where communities, including feminist ones, are formed, deformed and transformed by the ubiquitous presence of media capitalism, the increased frequency and ease of air travel, and instantaneous circulation of cultural products. There are also enhanced possibilities for transnational social media activism and ongoing exchanges of emotions and affects.

## The Honor Crime in Pakistan and in Canada

Honor killing, which is the ultimate form of the honor crime, is legally defined in the Pakistani Penal Code through British colonial laws, which were inherited by this country of over 200 million Muslims<sup>7</sup> when it was partitioned from India in August, 1947. Accordingly, Section 299 of the Pakistani Penal Code 1860 defines the honor crime thus: 'Offence committed in the name or on the pretext of honour means an offence committed in the name or on the pretext of karo kari, siyah kari or similar other customs or practices' (Office of the Chairman, n.d., p. 3). This definition is found in a recent study, which – although undated – was evidently produced in response to the murder of the iconoclastic social media star, Qandeel Baloch, details of whose life and death in 2016 were widely circulated by local, national and international media (Alam, 2020; Contrera, 2016; Maher, 2018; Rehman, 2017; Saifi & Raja, 2016). This report, which makes a prominent reference to the killing of Baloch, indicates the urgency of an official response to honor-related crimes, and notes that 15,222 such crimes were reported in Pakistan between 2004 and 2016. The report is of scholarly interest because it traces key moments in political history when the state attempted to modify honor crime-related laws in accordance with the ideological commitments of the era.

Unlike many other postcolonial nation states that were formed in Muslim societies in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (e.g., Turkey, Iran, or Iraq), the Republic of Pakistan did not pursue aggressive European-style secularism after independence in 1947. However, despite declaring itself an 'Islamic' republic in its early years, Pakistani electoral, legal, and cultural politics continue to be plagued by contestations over the exact nature of the relationship between Islam, the state, and national identity – especially in matters related to women's status, and the status of religious minorities. The use of Islam as a primary instrument for the moral regulation of Muslims and the oppression of non-Muslims has intensified ever since the 1980s. During this time, a military ruler, General Muhammed Zia ul Haq (1977–1997), imposed a top-down, repressive version of 'Islamization,' largely financed by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, which seeks to promote its own

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sectarian tradition of Wahabism/Salafism over Sunni Muslim states.<sup>8</sup> By explicitly allying with the USA and Saudi Arabia in the US–Soviet proxy war in Afghanistan (and later in the US-led ‘War on Terror’ [2001–2013]),<sup>9</sup> the Pakistani state invigorated a longstanding ideological project of some politico-religious parties to disavow its South Asian cultural and religious heritage to tighten linkages with its Islamic, specifically Arab, inheritance.<sup>10</sup> The dispiriting effects of cultural delegitimization pursued in the name of ‘Islamization’ have affected all areas of life in Pakistan, including the honor crime. As noted by Jonathan Brown (2016) of the US-based Yaqeen Institute for Islamic Research:

Violence against women and the failure of legal systems to punish... it is a serious problem in Muslim countries like Afghanistan and Pakistan. Islam and the Shariah should be mobilized as arguments against this rather than as its supposed causes. (p. 7)

Instead, Pakistan’s ‘Islamization’ measures increased loopholes for the impunity of perpetrators of honor crimes, since these laws were rife with misinterpretation and misuse of religious laws and practice (Office of the Chairman, n.d.). The devastating and long-ranging social, cultural, and emotional effects of these highly contentious ‘Islamic’ measures on the status and lived experiences of women and religious minorities is widely and exhaustively recorded.<sup>11</sup>

Relentless efforts of individual feminists, the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, Shirkat Gah, the Aurat Foundation, and many other scholars and activists to focus attention on honor-related violence ultimately led the Pakistani Parliament to unanimously approve landmark anti-rape and anti-honor-killing bills in October, 2016. By criminalizing honor crimes as a crime against the state, and allowing forensic testing to take place, despite the opposition of right-wing political leaders, these bills enabled punishment for family members who previously remained unpunished under so-called ‘Shari’a’ provisions (Bilal, 2016). The successful enactment of legal changes has not misled feminists and activists towards complacency in their efforts against misogynist and patriarchal practices like honor killing; indeed, as I will discuss later, women and feminists’ public challenges to and activism against moral and cultural regulation has intensified,

amplified, and advanced over the years beyond politico-legal struggles into more cultural, embodied, and affective domains.

In Canada, the notions of ‘honor crime’ and ‘honor killing’ are overwhelmingly defined by the context of immigration and settlement; the number of Muslims in Canada is now estimated to be more than 1 million, of which 36% are South Asians (Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, 2013; Statistics Canada, 2016; Thomas et al., 2011). In its definition of the honor crime, the report of the Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada (IRB) includes honor killings, acid attacks, confinement, imprisonment, interference with choice of marriage, burning, and disfigurement (Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, 2013). Despite this wide definition, the issue of honor-related violence tends to draw public attention only when the most horrific murders of women are sensationalized in the media. Discussing some of these cases, some Canadian critical feminist scholars have highlighted issues of access, culturally inappropriate strategies and Eurocentrism in the provision of state services for vulnerable girls and women. They have also noted that schools and educational institutions often lack counselling and crisis responses attuned to the needs of female Muslim students, especially those who might prefer non-interventionist approaches over conventional family counselling (Haque, 2010; Korteweg, 2012; Olwan, 2019). Korteweg (2012) also blames the state’s lack of leadership in its approach to honor-related violence; media and social media platforms, rather than parliamentary debates, tend to dominate public attention, and – I suggest – perhaps shape scholarly as well as popular attitudes. Such narratives tend to be replete with culturalist and Islamophobic representations that aim to bolster colonial and imperialist notions of Western civilizational superiority over ‘other’, ‘backward’ cultures and religions, rather than promoting serious debate about honor crimes or responses to this type of violence against racialized and Muslim women (Haque, 2010; Jiwani, 2014; Korteweg & Yurdakul, 2009; Olwan, 2019).

Not surprisingly, a concern with ‘culture’ and ‘community’ as a discursive framing for Islam/Muslims permeates contemporary scholarship that seeks to lessen honor-related violence against women without increasing racism and Islamophobia of the Western secular state and

society. I will attempt to review some of this literature from Canadian, as well as some US- and UK-based scholars, of relevance to South Asian Muslim women.

### **Postcolonial and Transnational Approaches to the Honor Crime**

The ensuing review of literature on ‘the honor crime’ does not claim to be exhaustive or unintentional; it is explicitly intended to situate my overall argument rather than be a pretense to be accurately descriptive or internally coherent. The aim here is not to accurately define or classify, but to discern the significance of different scholarly political concerns that are evident among scholarly positions.

I consider one set of scholarly publications that explicitly seek to understand and explain the honor crime as a sociological phenomenon, and to consider appropriate responses to it through social, legal, and policy strategies. Examples of these interventions are to be found in the important collections on honor-based violence, such as *‘Honour’ Killing and Violence: Theory, Policy and Practice* (Gill, Strange, & Roberts, 2014); *‘Honour’: Crimes, Paradigms, and Violence Against Women* (Welchman & Hossain, 2005); *Honour, Violence, Women and Islam* (Idriss & Abbas, 2010), and many others. In addition to these well-known and oft-cited works, I include in this scholarship important contributions by individual scholars such as Shah (2016), Ali (2001), Korteweg (2012), Jiwani (2014), Jamal (2006, 2015), Olwan (2019), and others (including Homa Hoodfar and Sohail Warraich), who underscore the patriarchal underpinnings of this type of violence in an attempt to avoid the pitfalls of cultural essentialism.

Conceptualizing honor crime as primarily ‘gendered’ violence, sociological approaches provide important insights about the cultural and contextualized nature of gender, as well as the gendered constructions of ‘honor’ and ‘shame.’ For example, while certain bodies – young women, transgender, lesbian and gay people of certain classes – are deemed to bear ‘honor’, others, such as heterosexual men of diverse ages, and older married women, are subjects of ‘shame,’ who must regulate and punish transgression (Ali, 2001; Reddy, 2014; Shah, 2016). This scholarship rejects

attempts to link honor crimes exclusively to non-Western cultures, calling at the same time for a concept of culture as dynamic, flexible, and changing, rather than immutable and innate. Further, they argue that rather than a determining system, culture, as well as religion, does not necessarily shape individual values and behavior uniformly within a society. An important insight about women's subjectivity, culled from this literature, is that while most women may imbibe or uphold dominant cultural norms as an integral part of their beliefs and practices, others may do so differently, or to a lesser degree, or reject them entirely. Based on her research on honor-related murders in the UK, Reddy (2014) encapsulates the relationship of culture and gendered violence aptly:

The two case studies [discussed in her paper] illustrate that a number of the various 'cultural differential' elements discussed above are indeed present in cases of 'honour killing,' but also clearly demonstrate the importance and centrality of the gendered aspects of such violence. In particular, they illuminate the common control of female behaviour, especially female sexual autonomy. (p. 35)

In sum, this important body of critical scholarship recognizes the racist underpinnings of ideological attempts to frame the honor crime as cultural, rather than gendered violence, but considers a strong, full, and nuanced accounting of culture to be integral to their attempts to eliminate the honor crime along with other forms of violence against women (VAW).

Diverging somewhat from these sociologically oriented studies, poststructuralist and postcolonial feminist critique emphasizes the discursive and representational practices that produce the contemporary meanings attached to concepts such as gender, culture and violence. These scholars tend to examine the honor crime within a critique of colonial and racist practices of governmentality, which permeate the modern state and civil society, and enable the production of gendered and feminist subjects that boost Western hegemony over non-Western societies. The critical race scholar Sherene Razack, whose work theorizes racial violence as a cornerstone of the White settler state in Canada, cautions feminists – especially Muslim feminists in Canada – not to depend on the state for protection from domestic/community violence without considering how

their demands will help the state's project of controlling its minority populations, and its interest in enhancing its position among White nations.

Concerned with the ongoing global legacies of 19<sup>th</sup>-century European colonial dominance, postcolonial scholars are interested in making explicit the political and material effects of universalist projects of modernization, including gender-affirming ones, in colonized populations, groups, and societies (Abu-Lughod, 2011; Grewal, 1999; Haque, 2010; Mahmood, 2008; Razack, 2008). A widely shared concern of these scholars is that hegemonic discourses attach patriarchal violence to communities and societies that are deemed to be dominated by religion, specifically Islam, compared with those that are seen to have made the civilizational leap forward into secularism. In the post-9/11 era, these scholars argue that honor-related violence within Muslim societies, when linked to culture or religion, or attributed to homophobia, enables constructions of Muslim men and Islam as culturally backward and ripe for remedial interventions by universalist organizations and powerful Western states (Abu-Lughod, 1998; Grewal, 1999, 2013; Olwan 2019; Razack, 2007). Furthermore, postcolonial feminists and anti-racists propose that when feminists in non-Western contexts couch their demands for women's human rights and state protection against VAW in universalist and rights-based terms, they re-inscribe colonial cultural narratives to identify and target communities and groups in their own societies as culturally backward and needing to be civilized or secularized.

Postcolonial scholars also offer various alternative strategies to subvert the denigrating culturalization of the honor crime (for example, see Abu-Lughod, 2002, 2011; Haque, 2010; Zine, 2008). This scholarship argues that many Muslim women and girls may exercise agency when they willingly and autonomously commit to externally imposed cultural or religious norms about respectability and honorable conduct. Overlapping with a few of the sociological studies reviewed above, some scholars may also weave these re-signifying strategies with a discussion of the structural effects of class, migration and racism in producing gendered desires that may lead women and girls towards individualistic behaviors, such as assertions of sexuality that coincide with Western norms.

While acknowledging the important contributions of all these studies, I seek to deepen and expand feminist politics on the honor crime by drawing scholarly attention towards the disparate, post-structural, heterogeneous and unpredictable effects and affects of colonial and postcolonial modernist discourses in projects of gender reform and VAW in Pakistan. The impulse to validate women's forbidden desires, bewail the desecration of women's bodies after honor killing and to commemorate their deaths despite customary prohibitions, is forcefully articulated in Pakistani feminist reports and studies on honor killing. Pakistani feminist scholarly and popular works identify the issue of honorable versus dishonorable conduct as a constitutive factor in all forms of gender-based violence against women, including sexual harassment, forced marriages, underage childbearing and honor killing (Alam, 2020; Ali, 2001; Khatri, 2019; Masihuddin, 2020; Mumtaz & Shaheed, 1987; Saigol, 2016; Zia, 2020). In Pakistan, although the killing of women and girls in the name of honor is condemned by diverse Islamic authorities such as the state, religious leaders, and national community, the idea of what constitutes 'honor' and what is 'dishonorable' conduct for Muslim women continues to be intensely and relentlessly battled in all public spaces, as well as between women's groups seeking their rights through universalist versus particularistic (Islamic) notions. Contested notions of 'Muslim women,' appealing on one side to universalist discourses of women's rights as human rights, and on the other to more restrictive and particularistic interpretations of Islamic traditions, continue to lock proponents and opponents of gender rights, sexual autonomy, and bodily autonomy.<sup>12</sup> These public, social and cultural struggles touch women's lives materially, emotionally and in embodied ways that women themselves may translate into acts of resistance but also moments of feminist euphoria.

### **Aurat March: A Politics of Willful Women?**

Since 2018, a visibly different brand of feminist activism has emerged in Pakistan, which gathers women, transgender persons, marginalized groups, and religious minorities every year in an Aurat March to celebrate International Women's Day. It is markedly different from previous and existing women's movements in Pakistan, since its leadership comprises a younger generation

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of feminist men and women in urban centers. The movement began by engaging in anti-patriarchy political activism on social media, and members then collaborated to organize a public street event (Khatri, 2019; Jabeen, 2019; Mustafa, 2018; Zia, 2020). A distinguishing feature of the politics of Aurat March is its focus on everyday patriarchal subordination and violence against women in homes, workplaces, and public spaces, in addition to state violence against women, non-binary individuals and groups and religious minorities (Alam, 2020; Azeem, 2020; Khatri, 2019; Zia, 2020). Clearly and unapologetically 'feminist' in its goals and representations, Aurat March organizers also reflect an important generational difference from earlier and ongoing organized women's movements, which focus most of their energy on the implications for women's rights stemming from the ideological character of the state (e.g., Jahangir & Jilani 1990; Jamal, 2013, 2015; Toor, 2008; Saigol, 2016; Zia, 2019). In contrast, Aurat March appears responsive to postcolonial and anti-imperialist scholarly concerns reflected in its wider call to women across not only class, rural/urban location, gender identity and sexual orientation, but also traversing what has stood for religious or secular in Pakistan (Wagha, 2020; Zia, 2020). For these and many other reasons, it is clear that the Aurat Marches in 2018, 2019 and 2020 have reached deeper into society than earlier women's movements.

All attention, positive and negative, at the local, national and international levels focuses annually on the posters, placards, and flags, which hit hardest at brothers, fathers, lovers, husbands and men in general. Slogans include 'Khana khud garam kar lo' ('Warm up your own meal'), 'Apna moza khud dhoondo' ('Look for your sock on your own'), 'Apni roti khud banao' ('Make your own roti'), 'Mera jisam meri marzi' ('My body, my choice') and 'Dic pics apnay paas rakho' ('Keep dick pics to yourself'). Many of these blatantly defiant slogans against conventional norms of appropriate female behavior and masculine authority have become the subject of debates in homes and community places, as well as in the national space. Indeed, the socially and cultural disruptive force of the Aurat March is evident in the counter-rage and hostility that it continues to draw each year from individual men, political and religious leaders, cultural authorities and state bodies, and the widespread and intensive circulation of these criticisms on social media, newspapers and television channels. As the Aurat March expands each year, it

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receives official condemnations from parliamentary bodies in some provinces, and individual men petition superior courts to ban the March (Khatri, 2019; Wagha, 2020; Zia, 2020). Writing shortly after Aurat March 2019, Khatri (2019) notes:

Most of the outrage was at the posters produced and carried by individual marchers. Detractors were outraged by the immodesty and vulgarity of the posters. Clerics issued fatwas, media personalities and journalists condemned the Aurat March and a provincial government passed a resolution condemning it as a destructive effect of Western ideology. (p. 14)

By far the most debated so far in Pakistani society and media is the theme slogan of the Aurat March 2020, 'Mera jism, meri marzi.' This was widely translated as 'My body, my choice' by many feminist defenders of the slogan, although the widely used term *marzi* also translates to 'autonomy, will or volition.'<sup>13</sup> But, as one analyst pointed out, it was the use of the term 'jism' ('body') that stunned male critics most, noting that "the word 'jism' in our society is packed with negative connotations and embedded with vulgar undertones, which makes the message of 'mera jism, meri marzi' seem overtly sexualized" (Images Staff, 2020). Many feminist commentators, analysts and scholars using a variety of media explained that the slogan was not a simplistic demand for women's sexual license, but a rejection of all forms of violence that are deemed to constitute the honor crime: sexual harassment, domestic abuse, workplace harassment, forced marriage, underage marriage, rape and honor killing. The crime of honor killing figures strongly in the marches, through multiple and creative representations of the murdered social media personality Qandeel Balouch, whose image is prominently displayed on promotional materials, and is worn by marchers in the form of masks (Alam, 2020). The importance of validating Balouch's social media celebrity and her provocative use of social media, along with memorializing her as a victim of honor killing, is an ongoing theme in each Aurat March (Alam, 2020). Drawing attention to the prominence of Balouch in the social media materials used for Aurat March 2018, Alam (2020) considers the former's digital acts and activities as a distinctive form of political activism. She points out:

Qandeel excelled in the innovative use of digital media to articulate political critiques of established gender relations, class hierarchies, political orders, and religious authorities. She also used her celebrity for redistributive ends. With the income she made from her social media fame she supported a dozen people in her village, a highly unusual development in a country where upward mobility is typically inaccessible for the working class. These aspects of her celebrityhood help explain why Aurat March organizers proclaimed that protest participants would 'march in [her] spirit. (p. 77)

Alam also notes the significance of feminists mobilizing around Qandeel's death, owing to which there was effective political and official support for an 'honor killing bill' aimed at fixing legal loopholes that enabled reprieve for perpetrators of the honor crime.

In 2020, the Aurat March had spread across cities and towns, substantially expanded the diversity of its participants, widened the list of issues affecting Pakistani women and amplified the boldness and candidness of its performance through placards, social media and mainstream media. Although Aurat March coincides with, and re-echoes, many of the themes of International Women's Day, which is observed globally on March 8, it is clearly rooted in more local and organic issues relevant to Pakistani women across classes, religions, sects, urban/rural differences, age and so on (Zia, 2020). Describing Aurat March as a "an emergent new politics of resistance in Pakistan," Afiya Zia is among the long-time feminists who welcomed the Aurat Marchers' privileging of gender oppression and bodily autonomy, which they acknowledged were important critiques faced by what may be called the 'mainstream' women's movement. Although women in Pakistan have always been visible and vigorous in drawing attention to violence against women, especially family and community-based violence such as the honor crime, their activism has tended to focus mainly on the state and the legal system as way to advance women's rights (Mumtaz & Shaheed, 1987; Zia, 2020). Zia herself is a prominent member of a successful women's movement, which emerged in the 1980s to fight against a misogynist nationalist and sectarian project conducted in the name of Islamization by the military regime. A staunch supporter of state-

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directed secular politics in Pakistan, Zia expresses concern that Aurat March could diffuse the existing state-directed, explicitly secular feminist agenda of the organized Women's Movement. Focusing on bodies and selves, she seems to propose, diverts attention from the role of the ongoing hegemonic project of state-imposed Islamization in configuring and redrawing boundaries along the lines of Islamic/secular, public/private, good/bad women. Indeed, several counter marches were organized by women members of politico-religious parties under banners such as 'Haya March' ('Modesty March'), and – in one incident – male student supporters of these parties began throwing stones and glass bottles at Aurat Marchers, enraged by the presence of women who they deemed to be 'be-haya' ('shameless') (Khan, 2020; Wagha, 2020). However, a participant in the Aurat March, Rehana Wagha (2020), notes that many of the Haya marchers' demands for women's rights did not differ greatly from those of the Aurat March, except that the key slogan 'Mera jism, meri marzi' was countered by 'Mera jism, Allah ki marzi' ('My body, Allah's will'). This, she concedes, indicates a "sharp ideological/non-bridgeable divide between the two categories of women" (Wagha, 2020). Possibly as a result of such cautionary advice, over three years the scope of the movement has expanded to underline the rights of marginalized groups through legal reforms, changes to labor laws and providing reproductive rights across the gender spectrum. Its 2020 manifesto also included calls for structural changes to implement social, economic and environmental justice, such as wider access to water and land, and protection from anti-encroachment drives that target poor and working class communities (Jabeen, 2019; Khatri, 2019; Zia, 2020). Yet, the Aurat March's main appeal/social significance remains tied to the attention it generates around women's lived experiences in the family, domestic labor, violence and bodily autonomy .

A comment by a non-participant observer published in a national daily newspaper aptly encapsulates the significance of the Aurat March in the social and political public sphere of society and its implications for the material well-being of Pakistani women. The commentator, who identified as a male gynecologist, welcomed the Aurat March 2020, recalling his own experiences of dealing with the many women and girls, especially in smaller towns, who were victimized by

male physical violence, or who were deprived of proper healthcare owing to masculinist control of women's bodies (Abdullah, 2020, p.2). He said:

This event has turned from a mere exhibit of interesting and controversial slogans, into a budding resistance movement against the strong-rooted patriarchal society of Pakistan. The build-up to the event keeps on getting more interesting each year, with participants from both sides of the debate gaining publicity through aggressive and exciting antics. (p.1)

The Aurat March is perhaps best understood through the emotional responses of its own participants and supporters, who represent it as 'a success story of 'Bad Women'' (Wagha, 2020), 'women's takeover of public space,' (Khatri, 2019), 'a new wave of feminism in Pakistan' (Azeem, 2019), and as a mode of space-making, as seen in the comment by Jabeen (2019, p.5):

"Walk to the dhaba in your neighbourhood and have chai there. Simply go sit there and enjoy a sultry cup of hot tea, and watch people. As a woman, it is an act of rebellion and resilience, which is why the impact of your choice feels strong to yourself and other people. As a man, if you can encourage the women around you to join you for a cup of tea, that would be amazing."

Another writer/participant rejoiced at the widespread appeal of the anti-violence stance among young feminists of diverse ideological leanings: "A friend of mine with a religious leaning replied to an offensive comment online by saying that 'it's my body and Allah wants me to protect it from rape and violence so I raise this slogan, 'Mera jism, meri marzi'''" (Wagha, 2020) In conclusion, Wagha (2020) cites the words of a longstanding feminist who told her:

The negative fallout aside, women's bodily autonomy is now part of public debate - the issue is being discussed in homes, public spaces, in the press and social media. At a personal level, filled with hope, I ignore the backlash, even the stoning. I see it as the

reaction of desperate, dying patriarchal forces and an attempt on their part to look relevant in a fast changing world. I am sure they will be on the retreat if democracy continues in Pakistan, and more women inevitably rise up. (paragraph number if no page number available)

I propose that young Muslim women in Toronto could be similarly welcoming and affected by the acts and activism of young Muslim women in Pakistan because it resonates with their emotional and cultural concerns, and their own activism in Toronto. As scholars, teachers, and activists, we could actively circulate and proliferate in our classes, among our students, in our institutions, communities and the societies we inhabit – as feminists have always done – stories and narratives about the desires and emotional agency of inspirational women in other places in the style of willfulness that Ahmed (2014) and Butler (2011) describe as a project of world-making. To do this is not an attempt to introduce or impose, in diasporic space, some notion of authenticity regarding homeland culture; indeed, as I mentioned earlier, similar projects of young feminists are already occurring, albeit mostly out of the orbit of official and authoritative public spaces of Muslim lives in Toronto. Like feminist projects everywhere, Aurat March is not a model for young feminists in Canada to adopt or recreate, but it is a style of politics that carries the possibility of fostering an affective and cultural transnationalism. Thus, it might resonate especially with those young South Asian Muslim women who desire their bodies to be seen neither as identitarian symbols of community, nor as colonially constructed victims of honor/culture-related violence, but as potential agents for challenging patriarchal ideas about gender, family, community and nation. Further, as I indicated earlier, the social and emotional success of Aurat March in Pakistan in bringing about awareness of young women’s desires and outrage to their own families and communities inherently lessens the significance of the imperialist rescue narratives that concern postcolonial feminist critics in Canada.

## Conclusion

Postcolonial and critical feminists have responded variously to the dilemma of confronting gendered violence that is (always) intersected by colonialism, racism and imperialism. Some feminist scholars, as well as activist groups, attempt to make the honor crime intelligible within a wider VAW discourse by pointing to economic and social structural factors, such as poverty, social marginalization or patriarchy (Brown, 2016; Cross, 2013; Jiwani & Hoodfar, 2012). Other scholars, taking a more discursive approach, re-theorize the target of honor crime as a 'victim of colonial representation' to counter the hegemonic construct of 'victim of cultural/Islamic oppression' that pervades popular, scholarly, and even feminist discourses in national and global contexts (Abu-Lughod 2002, 2011; Grewal, 1988, 1999; Haque, 2010; Razack, 2004, 2007, 2008; Welchman & Hossain, 2005).

In this paper, I have argued that these otherwise important and necessary interventions to the colonial and imperialist representation of Muslim women, encapsulated eloquently by Razack (2007, p. 5) as "the eternal triangle of the imperiled Muslim woman, the dangerous Muslim man and the civilized European," may overlook the significance of honor-related violence and the personal and political potential of Muslim women's own emotional responses to it. Diverging from these approaches, I ask that we re-conceptualize gender, culture, faith and community outside the frameworks of Westernized and authentic, Islamic versus secular feminism, pious versus transgressive subjects, and so on, which make Muslim women's subjectivity intelligible for both imperialist projects of Western nations, and patriarchal projects within Muslim communities and societies.

While being cognizant of the dangers of universalist agendas of the United Nations and First World aid-granting agencies, we can refuse to see Third World feminist projects as singularly a means for global transmission of Eurocentrism, Islamophobia, and racist notions of 'Muslim inassimilability,' as authoritative scholars have argued (Abu-Lughod, 2002; Grewal, 1999). In fact, an account of these transnational flows must also include new and ongoing projects of regional/global militarization, transreligious capitalisms, militant forms of religious patriarchies and reassertion of cultural orthodoxies in all contexts (Jamal, 2015; Saigol, 2016).

A different kind of feminist project could re-echo and amplify Muslim women's feelings and experiences of gender, culture and Islam without a predefined conception of Islamic or secular. Along with re-presenting the victim subject of honor crime as 'honorable,' we could legitimate the same desires and acts that are seen to justify the honor crime, regardless of the actual and varied reasons for its perpetration. From 'dishonoring' herself, family, and community, to being used as a scapegoat for crimes committed by male relatives, the victim of the honor crime tends to be represented by perpetrators as a disrupter of custom and religion – or what some have referred to as 'Willful' women (Ahmed, 2014; Jamal, 2006). I have drawn on Sarah Ahmed's exposition of Willfulness, which brings together a phenomenological concept of Willfulness as emotion and affect with a genealogical account of the gendered subject that could populate a Willfulness archive. Willfulness, as Ahmed conceptualizes it, is a gendered reversal of the sovereign, autonomous and rational Will that postcolonial, poststructuralist and anti-racist feminists have located in the colonizing and imperialist forms of feminism. Willfulness, especially when linked with feminism, conjures negative notions about women's behavior and character. Thus, I have argued, it may be appropriate to think about Muslim women who reject heteronormative, patriarchal and oppressive formations of faith, community and nation in this way. This may be one strategy to return emotion and feeling to sociological and postcolonial accounts of the honor crime. While validating the 'self-seeking' desires of young Muslim women, Willfulness also resonates with the heterogeneity, contestations and genealogies of dissent that constitute the very texture of Muslim lives and of the Muslim faith in South Asia and elsewhere.

As a politics of representation, the juxtaposition of seemingly disconnected feelings of young Muslim feminists in Canada – a self-defined secular society – and the acts and activism of women in Pakistan – an 'Islamic state' of 170 million Muslims – I suggest, disrupts colonial discourses about Muslim women's passivity and victimhood, distinguishes Muslim community from Muslim patriarchy, demystifies the purported immutability of Islam as a tradition, and loosens fixedness of community as politics of identity. The discussion of Aurat March is important

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for young Muslim women in Canada because it exemplifies a feminist activism that fuses parody, protest, pain, and performativity to address and hold responsible fathers, brothers, lovers, husbands, the family, and community, as much as the state, for failing to support, trust and respect women and their rights. Such experiences and insights of Pakistani, possibly South Asian, women received little or no attention in US–Canadian scholarship on the honor crime, even though it speaks in the name of Muslim women, and understands that most targets of the honor crime in North American societies are South Asian women.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>Many of these groups have a temporary life since they are dependent on social funding. Thus, they may transform into other projects or movements, or diversify into social media platforms. For examples of some activities see Cohen, 2013; and Artscape, 2014.

<sup>2</sup>This notion of Muslim women’s intentionally normative embodiment as a prerequisite of ‘community’ underpins many studies (conducted by, for example, Zine, Rinaldo, Haque, and Abu-Lughod) on Muslim women in the anti-imperialist and anti-Islamophobia scholarship after the US-led military operations in Muslim societies following the September 11, 2001 attacks against the US. See also Deeb, 2006; Mahmood, 2005; and Torab, 2007.

<sup>3</sup>Owing to the preoccupations of South Asian Studies historiographers in North America with the partition of India, the prioritizing of ‘religion’ in research on Muslims in response to US foreign policy towards the ‘Muslim World,’ and the ambiguous positioning of Pakistanis in mainstream social categories of Muslim and South Asian, the notion of Pakistani identity tends to be framed through political and nationalist affiliation. There is thus a gap in the cultural and social interactions of diasporic Pakistanis with both South Asia and Pakistani culture and society. For an analysis see Dadi, 2006.

The volume of remittances and engagement in homeland politics is evinced among the first generation through news reports and events commemorating historical events and poetry. As well, the burgeoning of brand-name fashion boutiques, both online and physical locations, and restaurants run by younger generation points to some of the interests of the second generation of professionals. However, those of us in academic and activist circles are aware of a small but significant population of second-generation Pakistanis who are involved in diasporic political struggles and coalitions with other groups but also attuned to the social political conditions in Pakistan.

<sup>4</sup>For a good discussion see Greco & Stenner, 2008.

<sup>5</sup>My interest in emotions and affect is shaped by the works of many scholars such as Ahmed (2014b); Gopinath (2005); Lara, et al. (2017), and others who have developed their ideas about gendered emotions and affects through their readings of Spinoza, Massumi, Deleuze and Guattari and many others.

<sup>6</sup>For a discussion of feminist theorizing of emotion and affect see Gorton, 2007.

<sup>7</sup>Current estimates.

<sup>8</sup>Wahabism is associated with the ideology of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Its founding ideologue Muhammed Ibn Abdul Wahab considered Muslims who believe in the intercessionary power of the Prophet Muhammed or seek saintly mediation, as do most South Asians, to be idolators, and thus guilty of apostasy. For a discussion. see Nasr (2006), pp. 81–117. Also see: ‘Chronology: Pakistan’ (2016); Baldor (2019); Weiss (1987).

<sup>9</sup>See Shinkman (2013). Despite the US President’s official announcement of the end of the war, US troops remain in Afghanistan and war-related violence continues as of June 2020. See Coll (2005).

<sup>10</sup>The feminist, political, social literature on this ideological intensification and its effects on women, religious and sectarian groups and non-normative genders is too exhaustive to reference but I recommend scholarly work by Ayesha Siddiqi, Khawer Mumtaz, Fareeda Shaheed, Ahmed Rashid, Nighat Said Khan, Amina Jamal, Sadaf Ahmad, Afiya Zia and Rubina Saigol, as well as journalistic writing by Zahid Hussain and I. A. Rahman, among others.

<sup>11</sup>Interestingly, despite the Pakistani state’s concerted legal, political, cultural efforts to distance itself from its Indian/South Asian cultural traditions in recent years, the report situates honor killings in a broad South Asian cultural context by linking local terms (e.g. ‘Karo Kari’ ‘Siyah Kari’ [‘black’ deeds/person], etc.) with the Hindu practice of ‘Sati’ widow immolation.

<sup>12</sup>See for example Dingwaney Needham & Sunder Rajan, 2007; Jalal, 2014; Jamal, 2013; Tejani, 2008; Toor, 2011; and Zia, 2018.

<sup>13</sup>For some meanings of Marzi in English see <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/hindi-english/> and <https://www.urdupoint.com/dictionary/urdu-to-english/marzi-meaning-in-english>

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