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Graduate Studies

*Modest Aspirations: Day Dreams, Frivolity and Digital Lives
of Public College Girls in Lahore, Pakistan*

A THESIS SUBMITTED BY

Anam Fatima Khan

TO THE

Department of Sociology, Egyptology, Anthropology

SUPERVISED BY

Dr. Hanan Sabea

February 2020

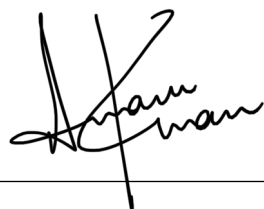
*in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
The Degree of Master of Arts in Sociology-Anthropology*

Declaration of Authorship

I, Anam Fatima Khan, declare that this thesis titled, “Modest Aspirations: Day Dreams, Frivolity and Digital Lives of Public College Girls in Lahore, Pakistan” and the work presented in it are my own. I confirm that:

- This work was done wholly or mainly while in candidature for a research degree at this University.
- Where any part of this thesis has previously been submitted for a degree or any other qualification at this University or any other institution, this has been clearly stated.
- Where I have consulted the published work of others, this is always clearly attributed.
- Where I have quoted from the work of others, the source is always given. With the exception of such quotations, this thesis is entirely my own work.
- I have acknowledged all main sources of help.
- Where the thesis is based on work done by myself jointly with others, I have made clear exactly what was done by others and what I have contributed myself.

Signed:



Date:

February 5, 2023



THE AMERICAN UNIVERSITY IN CAIRO

الجامعة الأمريكية بالقاهرة

Graduate Studies

**Modest Aspirations: Day Dreams, Frivolity
and Digital Lives of Public College Girls in
Lahore, Pakistan**

A Thesis Submitted by

<Anam Fatima Khan>

to the

Sociology, Egyptology, Anthropology

Graduate Program

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Abstract

This project was conceived out of a policy announcement in 2016 where the Higher Education Commission Pakistan announced that the two-year colleges were to be phased out and eventually eliminated. In doing so, the notice suggested that they will be replaced by programs modeled around the United States community college and called Associate Degrees. This ongoing development formed the basis of my research as for many gender and class minorities, these programs are the only option for post-secondary education in a country where many do not have the privilege to go to college. I aimed to analyze the kind of education they received during their time, their aspirations, and what they hope to get out of this program.

This thesis is divided into three chapters: the first one is called “Daydreams and Aspirations” and it explores a straightforward question: what does the future look like for these girls? Do they have certain aspirations regarding their careers or their home lives? What kinds of lives do they envision for themselves and how do we understand dreams and aspirations from a gendered and classed lens? Following this thread of inquiry, the second chapter is called “Navigating the Mundane: Fun, Frivolity, and Timepass” where I re-examine notions of transgressions, idleness, and the passing of time in college outside of attending classes and studying. Through this perspective, I am making a larger argument about how frivolities like teasing, joking, and doing nothing which are usually dismissed are important points of observation that unravel the complex dynamics of home and personal lives. In doing so, they also act as coping mechanisms and foster communities of support and friendship outside the jurisdiction of the home – which is rare for women who do not have access to public spaces. Finally, the last chapter “Mobile Phones, Digital Lives, and Morality in All-Girls Public Colleges in Lahore, Pakistan” looks at an important terrain in the contemporary moment: digital landscapes. Most women and girls in colleges own a mobile phone or have access to one, yet there is little work has been done on how digital access and mobile phone ownership impact the everyday lives of young, urban, Pakistani girls. By looking at ownership trends and usage of mobile phones, I attempt to understand the complex dynamics of a conservative Pakistani household and young people’s access to the internet. What kind of freedoms or restrictions do these girls have and how do they navigate these terrains? Through these questions, I try to add to my larger argument of how these girls live complex and multi-faceted lives despite living under disciplinary regimes of home and college.

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My acknowledgments will always start with my mother for everything she has made possible for me followed closely with Usman for being my partner in every sense of the word and for being my honorary thesis committee member. I would not be here without them. A big thank you to the SOAN department at AUC which welcomed me with open arms. I would like to especially thank my advisor, Dr. Hanan for her continued mentorship and support during the process of research and writing. Her ethic of compassion in academia is inspiring – I hope to carry it forward in whatever little capacity that I can. I thank Dr. Ian, Dr. Munira, and Dr. Manuel for always having their office doors open for a conversation – sometimes that is more helpful than one would think. I would also like to especially thank Dr. Martina from the Gender and Women Studies department for the rich discussions that her classes had to offer and the in-depth library of resources that I have from (what is hopefully the first leg of) my graduate career. I am truly grateful to her for making me feel at home in Cairo and for showing deep interest in my academic career. I have held on to her wise words as I plan my future academic trajectory.

I would also like to use this space to thank my teacher and mentor from my undergraduate years at the Lahore University of Management Sciences (LUMS), Dr. Maryam Wasif Khan for seeing (some) potential in me. She has taught me how to (closely) read, write, and live life, and for that, I will always be indebted to her.

A special thank you is reserved for Dr. Kamran Asdar who has been a constant in my journey from LUMS to AUC and beyond. Despite not being in an academic setting of a class or having a traditional teacher-student relationship, he introduced me to the world of anthropology and helped carve out the academic trajectory that I am on now. His generosity with his time is unmatched and I am truly grateful for his thoughtful feedback and continued encouragement. I do not know where I would be without his mentorship.

I would like to end by acknowledging my Ami and Abu who have shown me from a very young age what unconditional love and hard work looks like. I would also like to thank my brother, Qasim for being as weird as I am and for always showing love and support when it is needed the most. I also thank my in-laws for being patient and kind every time I was around them for the past year and a half and was working on my thesis. Finally, Nina, Zein, Mena, Nada, Habib, and all my friends in Cairo who have been pillars of support during this time, thank you. A special shoutout to Saltanat and Hira for checking up on me while in Cairo and for closely listening and offering advice during the process of research and writing. Friendship is an important theme in my thesis because of the empathy, love, and kindness that these people and my friends back home in Pakistan have shown me. I am honored to have this long list of people to thank.

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List of Abbreviations

MTDC	Model Town Degree College
DDC	Dharampura Degree College
VP	Vice Principal
PU	Punjab University
HEC	Higher Education Commission
BA	Two-year Bachelors degree

Introduction

Student & Parent ALERT!

Please do not take admission in unauthorised 2-Year BA/BSc or MA/MSc Programmes

Students are advised not to waste their time and money by enrolling in unauthorised degree programmes, such as 2-year BA/BSc or MA/MSc programmes. These programmes have been phased out because of quality concerns.

One or two universities have announced admission to unauthorised BA/BSc and MA/MSc programmes. While this will earn money for the university, it will not be in the interest of the students. These discarded degrees will not enable students to apply for jobs or further education.

The decision to phase out the BA/BSc and MA/MSc programmes, and replace them with a single, composite, 4-year BS degree was taken in 2004. However, universities were allowed to continue both systems in a transition period.

In 2011, the Associate Degree (AD) was announced as an alternative to the BA/BSc degree. AD is equivalent to 14 years schooling, and entitles graduates to get admission in the 5th semester of respective BS programmes after fulfilling the admitting university's requirements.

In 2016, the transition period was concluded, and a final decision made to stop admissions in BA/BSc programmes on December 31, 2018, and in MA/MSc programmes on December 31, 2020. It was also decided that the last BA/BSc exam would be held in 2020, and that the admission to the last batch of MA/MSc students would take place before December 31, 2020. These decisions were confirmed in 2017, and again in 2018, 2019, and 2020.

However, because of the disruption caused by the coronavirus, the following flexibility was allowed:

- ▶ Universities were given a grace period of three months to conclude the final BA/BSc exams before March 31, 2021.
- ▶ Similarly, the deadline for admission to the final cohort of the MA/MSc programmes was extended to March 31, 2021 so that the final cohort of BA/BSc students could apply for admission.
- ▶ In addition, holders of BA/BSc degrees were allowed to apply for admission in the third year or 5th semester of the BS programme, subject to the completion of a bridging semester or any additional course requirements that the university may impose.
- ▶ Any student who has missed the deadline to get admission to the MA/MSc programmes can apply instead for admission to the third year (i.e. 5th semester) of the BS programme, which is a far superior option.
- ▶ Fresh students can be admitted either directly into the 4-year BS programme, or in the 2-year Associate Degree Programmes, offered through recognized campuses, constituent and affiliated colleges in place of the old BA/BSc programmes.

In case of admission in illegal and phased-out programmes, the students will end up bearing all risks and costs or any associated loss incurred. HEC cannot recognize degrees of students who enrolled in conventional BA/BSc programmes after **December 31, 2018** and in MA/MSc after **March 31, 2021**.

Higher Education Commission, Pakistan
Sector H-9, Islamabad | www.hec.gov.pk

@HECPakistan2002 @hecofficial hec_pk

Figure 1: Announcement on the Higher Education Commission Website

This project was conceived out of a policy announcement in 2016 where the Higher Education Commission Pakistan announced that the two-year colleges were to be phased out and eventually eliminated. In doing so, the notice suggested that they will be replaced by programs modeled around the community colleges in the United States and called Associate Degrees — which are designed around a “market-driven” curriculum. According to the National Human Development Report (Pakistan) sponsored by UNDP, over 50% of the student population (male and female) choose to opt for a non-professional bachelor degree in social science, arts, humanities, etc. which leads to an oversupply of graduates with no professional skills in a developmental economy. Despite these statistics and the suggestion that follows regarding these

degrees needing to be more market-oriented, my initial interest in the project was driven by my curiosity to look at why so many students still go for these degrees. This ongoing development formed the basis of my research. For many women and working-class youth, these programs are the only option for post-secondary education in a country where many do not have the privilege to go to college. I wanted to analyze the kind of education they received, their aspirations, and what they hoped to get out of the program.

In order to understand the context within which this research project is situated, in this section I will delve into the structural aspects of Pakistan's higher educational landscape. My fieldwork is based in all-young women degree colleges in Lahore, Pakistan. While in the American education system, colleges refer to four-year undergraduate institutes, in Pakistan higher education adopts a different stratification. My research is based on degree colleges for women which are also four-year colleges but they offer two years of secondary education, locally referred to as FA/FSc/ICS¹, and two years of post-secondary education in the form of a BA/BSc/Bed degree (now equivalent to junior colleges/Associate degrees in the United States). Quite a few of these colleges have also evolved to be called: postgraduate colleges for women as they also include the option of a two-year MA degree that students can undertake right after their BA degrees.

Pakistan is governed under a federal constitution that further branches out into four autonomous provinces of Sindh, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Punjab, and Balochistan. According to the Economic Survey Report (2019-2020), the province of Punjab alone had 777 public and 1632 private colleges that are affiliated with larger (four-year degree-granting) universities. Pakistan

¹ Internationally equivalent to 11th and 12th grades in the American High School System and A levels in the British Secondary Education System.

inherited the British education system instituted in the late nineteenth century that intended to expand the Indian bureaucracy during the British colonial rule of the subcontinent. I will briefly unpack the kind of education offered at these colleges by looking at the system of examinations. Pakistan's educational infrastructure has three main levels, primary, secondary and higher education, much like the rest of the world. Secondary education includes a matriculation certification granted at the successful passing of tenth-grade examinations and similarly FA/FSc/ICS certification which is received at the end of twelfth grade. This is followed by a two- or four-year bachelor's degree. Most of the college student population is enrolled in the two-year BA owing to a dearth of four-year universities which are usually situated in big cities and are more competitive to get into. The Higher Education Commission oversees evaluation and monitoring at the federal and provincial levels. The Commission was conceived in 2002 after the 1970s nationalization of the education sector in Pakistan, with the aim of increasing the number of private universities in order to share the burden of producing human capital within the public sector (Qazi, Simon, Rawat, Hamid, 2010).

While initially my project was fueled by a curiosity to understand why so many students were still opting for the two-year BA which no longer was recognized by the HEC (Figure 1), I soon realized that students did not know about this policy change. For many students from low-income households, attending public colleges and getting a certification is the main goal. The structure of education is based primarily on annual (year-end) examinations and attaining a degree is necessary for employment or social validation. Teaching, learning, and gaining knowledge are all secondary to that one aim.

Government degree colleges also function as host institutes for “private candidates” who are students who choose to take their annual examinations at a government body, in this case, the college. Women in particular opt for this path owing to the unaffordability of colleges, but mostly because of the lack of mobility that comes with marriage or families that do not allow women to leave the home (Ashfaq 2021). During the course of my fieldwork, it was not uncommon to see students not in uniform at the colleges. They would usually drop in for queries or registration purposes, if not to sit in for their annual exams.

My fieldwork was multi-cited, in that it originated in the Model Town Degree College (MTDC) for Women and eventually moved to Dharampura Degree College for Women (DDC). It is worth noting that the geography of both these colleges was very different. However, the disciplinary code of conduct and organizational hierarchies remained the same. Before delving into what made these two colleges different, I want to paint a picture of the basic rules and regulations governing these colleges. Modesty is the overall governing principle when it comes to rules concerning clothing, accessorizing, addressing the administrators and teachers. Student hierarchies are best explained by the colored lace on the front edges of the young women’s school uniform shirts. The first year (11th grade) was represented by a green ribbon/lace, the second year (12th grade) had a yellow ribbon, while third-year students (Bachelors year 1) had a blue ribbon and fourth-year student (Bachelors year 2) had a red ribbon. One could just look at someone and recognize in which year of schooling they were from, thus rendering students easier to manage from the perspective of the college administration and teachers.

Government colleges have a large influx of students and limited resources to accommodate them which is why a typical college day is divided into two timetables: the

morning shift and the afternoon shift. The former is reserved for students who had applied on time and had better grades than the latter. The morning shift usually consists of a majority of the student population while the afternoon shift was not as populated. At Dharampura College, young women from the afternoon shift, which started at 12 pm, had a different uniform consisting of a pink *dupatta* instead of the regular white one for the morning shift. Young women from the second shift would complain about how they were not given much respect in the college. Most of them had to attend makeshift classes on the ground or other spaces outside the main buildings because all the classrooms were reserved for the first shift or science students. Another hierarchy that persisted was in the choice of subjects. For most of my fieldwork, teachers and administrators would go out of their way to make sure that I only talk to science students. Principals at both colleges would boast about their record-breaking annual results in science subjects. One of the principals went so far as to caution me to stay away from the “art students” – a terminology reserved for students who opted for subjects in the humanities. It is important to understand what constitutes these categories of science and arts and how these hierarchies are perceived in the colleges. Science students that I was pushed to interview and spend time with were sixteen/seventeen-year-old young women primarily in FSc (11th and 12th grades) who aspire to become doctors. In Pakistan, career options for women primarily evolve around becoming teachers and doctors for those who have the opportunity to continue their education post-secondary schooling. A lot has been written about the phenomenon called “doctor brides” (Zakaria 2013, Masood 2019, Mohsin and Sayed 2020) which discusses the excess of medical and pre-medical female students and the lack of female doctors in the workforce. Quite a lot of women end up getting a medical education only to drop out after they get their degrees. Doctor *bahus* (daughters-in-laws) are highly sought after in the marriage market in Pakistan.

Families encourage their daughters to pursue a medical degree in hopes of a marriage proposal from a socioeconomically well-to-do family. However, while families aspire for a doctor *bahu* they often do not want them to continue working after marriage. There is ample literature on women choosing to opt out of the labor force owing to domestic pressures (Stone 2007, Stephens and Levine 2011, Kossek, Su, and Wu 2017). During my fieldwork, most students who aspired to be doctors would spend their breaks between classes studying and would join “academies” in the evening for extra tutoring and individualized attention that they would not get in college. While I talked to many students who aspired to be doctors, most of them did not know whether they would be able to continue their education. Nonetheless, the idea of working towards being a doctor was exciting as it pleased their parents, teachers, and relatives. While my thesis looks at aspirations, it is not focused on high-achieving students. I look at the category of art students who were regularly dismissed as “stupid”, “troublemakers”, and “average students” who were “not interesting”. Students whom I was told were “not worth researching”.

The research for this thesis evolved over time, and I gradually asked different questions than when I first started. Initially I examined how two-year public colleges crafted citizens and laboring subjects. I focused on the concepts of the nation-state, family as a domestic space of laboring, and middle-class aspirations in the context of higher education. However, I realized halfway through that I was trying to fit my fieldwork into pre-made categories of women controlled by structures of the state, education, and family. I then moved my fieldwork to Dharampura College situated near old Lahore – an area that is socio-economically quite different from my first field site: Model Town college. The ethnographic method allowed for a bottom-up approach that my initial research was lacking and it led to the thesis that I am presenting.

This thesis is divided into three chapters: the first one is called “Daydreams and Aspirations” and it explores a straightforward question: what does the future look like for these young women? Do they have certain aspirations regarding their careers or their domestic lives? Following this thread of inquiry, the second chapter is called “Navigating the Mundane: Fun, Frivolity, and Timepass” where I re-examine notions of transgressions, idleness, and the passing of time in college outside of attending classes and studying. Through this perspective, I am making a larger argument about how frivolities like teasing, joking, and doing nothing which are usually dismissed are important points of observation that unravel the complex dynamics of home and personal lives. In doing so, they also act as coping mechanisms and foster communities of support and friendship outside of the home – which is rare for women who do not have access to public spaces. Finally, the last chapter “Mobile Phones, Digital Lives, and Morality in All-Young women Public Colleges in Lahore, Pakistan” looks at an important terrain in the contemporary moment: digital landscapes. Most women and young women in colleges own a mobile phone or have access to one, yet there is little scholarly work on how digital access and mobile phone ownership impact the everyday lives of young, urban, Pakistani women. By looking at ownership trends and usage of mobile phones, I attempt to understand the complex dynamics of a conservative Pakistani household and young people’s access to the internet. What kind of freedoms or restrictions do these young women have and how do they navigate these terrains? Through these questions, I try to add to my larger argument of how these young women live complex and multi-faceted lives despite living under disciplinary regimes of home and college. In the rest of this introduction, I will look at the two sites of my ethnography and how they differ. I also outline the conceptual framework of my thesis focusing on modesty, aspirations, and desires, a thread that runs through the different chapters of the thesis.

Situating Fieldwork: Multi-cited Ethnography in the Socio-Urban Landscape of Lahore

Model Town Degree College (MTDC) is situated in a residential area called Model Town which is one of the first planned communities in Lahore. It was established in 1921 as a suburb for the Indian bourgeoisie (Anbrine Shama 2014). After partition it was declared an evacuee property according to the community's website, which means that most of the owners were either Hindus or Sikhs who fled to India, and their homes were reclaimed by refugee Muslims from the other side. Model Town is not a new money, flashy locale, but it is also not a run-down neighborhood. It is known for its generational houses and educated families. It has the largest and most accessible (family-friendly) park in the city and has its own library and commercial areas. During the numerous conversations that I had with students and faculty, they also implied how their choice for this college was because it was a "clean" locale or was located in a "respectable" area. The map in the figure below shows Model Town in the red dotted line, surrounding areas of Nishtar Town, Kotlakpat, Garden Town, and Township where most of the young women who attend the college come from. While situated in Model Town, MTDC caters to the demands of surrounding areas that are not as socio-economically well-off as Model Town.

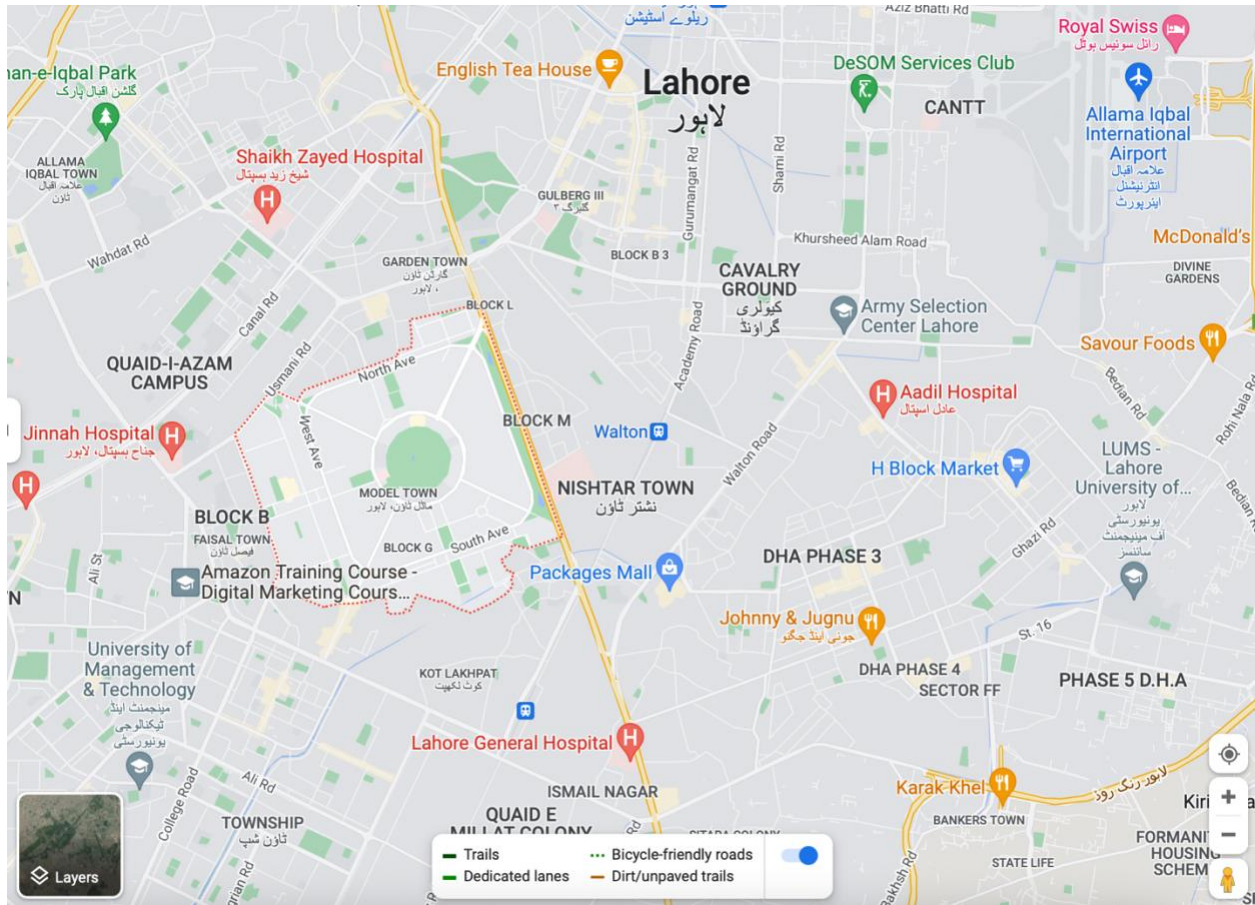


Figure 2: Screenshot of Model Town from Google Maps

There is a class disparity in the choice to attend college. Individuals from affluent areas like DHA, Cantt, and Model Town often choose to go to private elite universities like the Lahore University of Management Sciences, and the University of Management Sciences (shown in the figure above), amongst other institutions. As a researcher who graduated from one of these elite universities (LUMS), I was continuously made aware of my extreme privilege. A question that I would often encounter at both these colleges was: “why are you here?” or “did you not find a better place”? Students would often describe their colleges as a last resort option. They did not actively choose to attend it. It was a decision made for them by their parents or community owing to reasons that boil down to convenience and expense. I explore this further in my first

chapter, but my reason for bringing this here is to highlight how government degree colleges are often just seen as degree-granting institutes and are not known for prestige or quality education in urban Lahore. People whom I encountered during my fieldwork, looked to medical/engineering or four-year universities as emblems of success and being smart.



Figure 3 (a) and 3 (b) Model Town Degree College

While MTDC was located in a posh area of Lahore, my second site of fieldwork was Dharampura Degree College for Women (DDC) – the name of this college has been altered to a close estimate location owing to the principal’s discomfort in disclosing the location. Situated in the dense traffic of motorbikes, rickshaws, and donkey carts littered with a few small Suzuki Mehrans and the very rare Toyota or Honda sedan is DDC – an area that is vastly different from the clean roads and planned community infrastructures of MTDC. DDC is located in an alleyway adjacent to the main road of the mass public transit system: the Orange Line Train (shown in Figure 4(b)). Positioned near Grand Truck Road and Old Lahore, DDC is in the heart of what

some may refer to as downtown Lahore. Away from posh residential communities, this area is home to local merchants, shopkeepers, and white and blue-collar workers. Tucked away in small alleys are homes, tuition academies, schools, and small shops. This urban landscape allows for close-knit community living. Most of the students at DDC came from nearby areas but unlike their counterparts at MTDC, these young women relied on rickshaws or walked on foot in groups and usually in a *burqa* to avoid unwanted attention. This relationship with the city was very different from what young women in MTDC experienced. The latter relied on private school/college transportation services or the public college bus to pick up and drop them off. While students at MTDC would occasionally sneak out and sit in nearby parks, their ability to walk and navigate areas of Model Town was limited by college surveillance which made sure that no one was seen outside the gates of the campus. On the other hand, young women at DDC belonged to a locale, which was not socio-economically as prosperous as Model Town though they had more mobility and access to public spaces. While MTDC also housed lower-middle-class students, DDC had a majority of students who came from working-class homes. I talked to young women whose fathers were day laborers, shop keepers, and clerks, and whose mothers were small beauty salon owners or tailors. They lived in close proximity to their aunts, uncles, grandparents, and cousins and would have access to the public spaces surrounding their homes owing to networks of kin who live close by. On the other hand, young women at MTDC would usually be restricted to their homes unless it was for a weekly family outing or if their fathers or brothers had the time to drop them off at a friend's house – the latter instance was a rarity.



Figure 4 (a) on the left shows the alleyway in which DDC is located.

Figure 4 (b) on the right shows the main road underneath the Orange Line Train and one of its stations.

All pictures in this thesis are taken by the author



Figure 5: Google Maps shows the approximate location of DDC

Teachers at MTDC were hesitant to talk and would actively avoid having a conversation with me. Many would leave the room or find an excuse if I would sit next to them for a casual chat, whereas the teachers at DDC were eager and curious, and were open to conversing. While my thesis does not get into the intricacies of class, it is worth pointing out that the college that catered to much of the working-class population was more open and collaborative when it came to my presence as a researcher in their midst.

On Method: Ethnography of Higher Education in Pakistan

My research is based on the ethnographic method of observation in order to fill the gap that statistics and numbers often overlook (Bourgois 1995). There has been negligible work on young women in Pakistan who attend public colleges. Research in education has often been solution-oriented, often looking for ways to identify problems within the existing structures of institutions and states. By using anthropology as a discipline and ethnography as its tool, I aim to examine the everyday realities from the bottom up. Routines we take for granted, interactions we forget about, and the multitude of relationalities contained within this field of every day offer a rich variety of material to unpack. The assembling and reassembling of everyday routines and mundanities allow us to question what we think we already know (Law 2004).

Born and raised in the city where my research is based, I confronted the challenge of class positionality. Coming from a privileged background of having attended private schools and universities, I was seen and treated as the privileged other by the teachers, staff, and students alike. Fieldwork posed a challenge as I would personally go from door to door to various colleges to conduct research, only to be denied access. Like many bureaucratic processes in Pakistan, you must know someone to get access. Access to the two colleges where I conducted my fieldwork was through a personal connection who knew the security guards that sat beside the entrance gates to check everyone's ID card. For the first few days, many of the teachers and administrators obliged my request for research thinking I was related to the principal until one of them realized that I was not in fact related to her and stopped talking to me. I was constantly cautioned by the teaching and administrative staff about not writing anything scandalous about the colleges. For example, the Principal at MTDC said:

“We have a limited budget and there is only so much we can do when all these young women have to pay is 4500 rupees in one year. At the end of the day, they're getting a degree and that's what matters.”

Similarly, I was warned against any attempt at “heroism” aimed at “saving” these young women, which was a persistent theme in previous journalists/researchers who were granted access. While I was constantly surveilled at one college, I managed to assure the administrators at the other college about not having any intentions to “expose” the college. The question that came up next was usually about why I was there. Rubeena, a teaching intern in the Physics department at DDC would often ask me during our conversations:

“Why do you come here? You talk to these young women, day after day but do you even find something interesting? You can talk to one young woman and know that they're all the same. You won't find anything new here.”

Like Rubeena, many believe that Pakistan's young women's lives are not interesting enough to warrant research. Teachers were generally circumspect about me spending too much time with the young women alone. I was warned to be wary of their “stories” and to stay away from “*fast* young women” who would lure me in with “tales of sorrow”. Barring one young woman who asked if she could sneak out of the college so that I could take her for a drive around the city, most of the young women themselves were guarded when it came to establishing a connection. Initially, most of them thought that I was a teacher, given my age and the way that I dressed. However, many young women were curious and confident enough to ask questions about my life in order to understand my context. Apart from teachers and students, establishing a

connection with the security personnel and male administrative staff proved to be more difficult.

While I spent quite a bit of time at the colleges, a lot of my conversations and interactions with students took place online through social media applications like WhatsApp and Snapchat. The former was used for longer conversations and phone calls while Snapchat, where messages sent disappear in 10 seconds, was widely used to communicate their daily routines. To that end, the building of trust took place online. The internet was a great space to maintain connections when colleges would close on short notice during the pandemic. In addition to this, I usually had a very short window to spend time with young women when they were not in classes and before they had to head home, usually between 11 to 1 pm. Another added challenge was that cell phones were not allowed in college, so there was no way of knowing whether I would meet the same people I met on a said day, given the large population of students. However, eventually young women would find me or vice versa. I would usually walk around campus or follow whoever was willing to spend time with me and sometimes that would attract attention and I would be called away by one of the teachers. However, despite these minor challenges I managed to interview, spend time with, and have conversations with students, and teachers alike. Ethnography allowed me to shed light on an aspect of young women's lives that is often taken for granted or ignored.

Anthropology of Higher Education

In order to conceptually frame my thesis, it is important to situate it within the larger literature on higher education. As mentioned above, public degree colleges in Pakistan have the highest enrollment owing to their very affordable fee structure. However, these colleges are

known for their poor quality of instruction and curriculum that has not been updated for decades. Many people still opt for these programs because they offer an easy and quick alternative to acquiring a degree as opposed to the four-year college route. Higher education can be seen as a business model where education is the commodity and students are the consumers (Bartlette et al 2002). To that end, higher education has two primary functions; first to increase the number of degrees issued, which directly correlates to figures relating to national economic performance. Secondly, education aims to turn “disruptive students” into “productive citizens”. Pakistan has seen a high rate of youth unemployment simply because there is a large supply of graduates with few employment opportunities. The higher the income level, the higher the demand for education followed by the indicator that a mother’s education is a decisive factor in whether individuals choose to opt for higher education (Albert 2000). Higher education is premised on the promise of employment guaranteed by the degree. However, what does employability imply? It is often an elusive term used to advertise college degrees. Colleges claim to imbue skills in the degrees that they offer to prepare students for the labor market. However, there is no clear understanding of what exactly employability refers to. Further, measuring employability is difficult because universities look at how many graduates have a job within six months of graduation, which accounts for only short-term success. ‘Success’ is attributed to the university and not the individual (Cranmer 2007) and employability is seen as a performance indicator often overlooking how categories of gender, class, and race influence the labor market (Morley 2001). Finally, narrowing the focus to the global south or ‘developing’ countries, unemployment is linked to nationalist policies since the mid to late twentieth century which promised that higher education would lead to government jobs (Salehi-Isfahani 2012). Livanos argues that a public college degree, given its low cost, is seen as a “passport” to public sector jobs that promise

housing, pension schemes, and a “safety net” which is not available in the private sector (Livanos 2010). Therefore, people choose to stay out of the private labor market and prepare for government/bureaucracy competitive examinations until they “make it” – which was the case for many teachers that I talked to. They had to pass multiple rounds of examinations and teach at various colleges on temporary contracts before landing an Assistant Professor job.

Modesty: A frame for Gendered and National Identities

This thesis is titled “Modest Aspirations” in an attempt to capture two important conceptual frameworks that run through all the chapters: modesty and aspirations. Public colleges for women in Pakistan are big propagators of modesty through disciplinary codes which range from the kind of uniform that needs to be worn to how it should be worn, down to the length of one’s *shalwar* (A loose pleated pants worn widely in the subcontinent). which must cover one’s ankles. The framework of modesty is embedded in the national project of Pakistan. For the sake of brevity and context, I will not go into details of *purdah* or veiling as that would account for a separate, much longer discussion. Through the use of ethnographic fieldwork, my chapters deal with underlying themes of modesty and by extension, larger notions of morality that speak to the significance of education for the production of national and gendered identities. Pakistan’s national project began in 1947 when the British left the subcontinent, dividing it into two countries: India and Pakistan. The latter’s origin story is based in Islam, a Muslim-majority country for the Muslims of the subcontinent. This national identity of being Muslim equals being Pakistani is a contested proposition since Pakistan is a country with diverse ethnicities, religions, and ways of being, a challenge to the homogenizing national project since its conception. Despite their troubling foundations, national identities are established through institutional

regulations at the state level – including education (Ozkrimli 2005). Through performance, national identities are constructed via official disciplinary rules but also by social interactions and everyday routines and repetition (Butler 1990, Edensor 2002). With Islam being an important aspect of Pakistani national identity, the public college for women is designed around concepts intended to produce the ideal modest Muslim woman.

I want to bring in conceptualizations of the family and home to get a better understanding of modesty. Veena Das in *Life and Words* (2007) looks at the partition of the subcontinent in 1947 as an important moment in shaping how the modern family was set up with its patriarchal relations and the birth of the housewife around which modesty is centered. Partition is seen as a re-sorting of the state where the British left the subcontinent and India became a social laboratory. Simply put, the state is now the arbitrator of what constitutes the Indian family. The figure of the abducted woman emerges in a moment of crisis where Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs were forcibly marrying women from the ‘opposite’ side of the partition as they represented honor in the subcontinent. This abducted woman became a site through which the patriarchal family was consolidated. The figure of the abducted woman was used to reiterate that a man was the woman’s protector and that her true place was in the domestic sphere. I mention Das and her sharp analysis of the partition because the Pakistani state is based on a similar social contract. This means that the public colleges I am researching are interested in producing female subjects suited for the domestic sphere. This is one way to understand why the enrollment rates in these colleges are higher than the demands of the market. Education, particularly from a woman’s college, adds value to young women’s marriageability, particularly in middle-class families. Furthermore, the college not only produces good wives and mothers but also inculcates acts of citizenship in its student body. Citizenship is about community and practices. Rather than

expecting things to be given or the government to do all the work for you, statecraft requires tremendous efforts from the citizen body (Julia Eckert 2011). Public colleges teach women (and men) how to be good citizens by establishing routines and rituals that need to be enacted for citizenship to be cemented. This creation of docile subjects is central to the project of the state and bureaucracy.

Thinking through the Framework of Aspirations: Beyond Subjectivity and Docility

An institution is many things at once. While serving its primary purpose of imparting academic and cultural knowledge, it is also a space where young women can experiment with different ways of being. The young women at both colleges that I research were aware of this, a theme that I explore by focusing on their aspirations.

This project was founded on a genuine curiosity to unravel what it was like to be an ordinary Pakistani young woman who was attending a public college. Aspirations help us think through the future and look at how past influences are instrumental in shaping the future (Pine 2014). The contemporary moment is characterized by consumption and the making of “desiring subject” (Rofel 2007). This was evident through the course of my fieldwork where young women were in a constant state of consumption and fulfilling desire through the purchase of new cell/mobile phones, laptops, televisions, etc. However, despite these ostensible observations about desiring material objects, I was looking for what these young women aspired to. What do they want to do when they grow up? Had do they envision a certain life for themselves? Were they burdened by societal restrictions and familial obligations to give up their dreams? Soon after I started my fieldwork, I realized that my understanding of what aspirations meant was very

different from what the young women at public colleges in Lahore understood. While the first chapter engages with the ethnographic aspect of unraveling aspirations, what was an important takeaway for me was that my understanding of aspirations was based on class. Young women and women from the lower middle class and working classes do not have the privilege to conceptualize what their future looks like. For many of them, how their lives will look is already prescribed. Like their mothers, sisters, aunts, and other women kin, they will go on to marry and have their own families. To that end, I became more interested in what their present looked like and what it meant to live life outside a very fixed understanding of aspirations.

Class is a very complex category but in Lahore, people from the upper strata of society have a certain perception of what it means to be working class or lower-middle class. These perceptions revolve around these women being confined to spaces of the home and acts of homemaking. My thesis demonstrates how these young women are complex individuals and despite the fact that some of them may in fact end up as house wives, they have diverse and oft contradictory wants and desires.

I explore notions of happiness and good life critically, in order to look at how people construct their realities through hopes and dreams and how it adds depth to their personhood. Sara Ahmed (2010) looks at conceptions of happiness and the good life that are fed to us by society. There are categories of “happy objects” which promise a future of happiness and they usually revolve around notions of family, marriage, hard work, etc. These objects represent the life that everyone should strive for. Happiness is linked to the desire for these objects while anything that falls off the radar of this desired life should lead to unhappiness. Ahmed’s work comes in an important moment with the rise of the “happiness industry” which produces self-

help books on how to be happy, statistics like the happiness index determining which nation is the happiest, amongst other “happiness commodities”. I evoke Ahmed’s framework here because students who are basically labor-in-training of becoming wives are taught to embody the notion of a happy individual as a part of being a good woman. Happiness paints over complex human lives and everyday realities.

In the same vein, Berlant (2011) portrays how the contemporary moment is characterized by instability. Individuals attach themselves to aspirations of the good life that sustain us and organize us by giving us hope for the future and the present moment. Her notion of cruel optimism paves the way for a deeper understanding of fantasies of the good life that are not possible to sustain in the present moment. This theoretical frame is important for my thesis as the young women in public colleges grapple with a similar dilemma that I unpack in my first chapter on aspirations. In line with Berlant, my understanding of aspirations can be understood by what she terms: “objects of desire: a cluster of promises we want someone or something to make us and make possible for us” (2011: 23). The young women in public colleges have two broad categories of desire: one is that of consumer aspirations which include mobile phones, access to the internet, clothes, makeup, etc. (Lukose 2005); while the second one is that of marriage. Thinking through Berlant’s argument, these objects of desire are inherent promises tied to a future possibility: marriage. The young women recognize that certain attachments, such as marriage, are cruel in nature. I bring Berlant into my conceptual framework because a lot of my fieldwork was spent talking to young women where marriage and weddings were a natural and mundane part of conversations. However, one of the reasons I turned to ethnography to flesh out the lives of these young women to recognize was Berlant calls of an “impasse”. This is when one recognizes that their object of desire or a promised future is unstable and riddled with

problematics She writes: “The ordinary as an impasse is shaped by crisis in which people find themselves developing skills for adjusting to newly proliferating pressures to scramble for modes of living” (2011: 8).

One of the first things I was asked during my fieldwork was whether I was married. Upon finding out that I was, young women as young as fifteen would ask me a host of questions about how I am able to work and study despite being married. Whether I am burdened with the responsibilities of my in-laws or pressured into having children, amongst a host of issues that they recognized as being associated with marriage. Despite knowing the tough realities of marriage in their communities, it is also something that young women desired for themselves. At this impasse, they had the skills to navigate these situations, for instance, what counted as transgressive behavior in college would ordinarily be looked at as standing up for oneself in conflict situations amongst other social skills that help navigate the terrain of marriage. Borrowing from this line of thinking, the complexities of class which were riddled throughout my fieldwork became more apparent. For instance, a general view of individuals from my privileged background is that middle-class women, and I use this term cautiously, are educated and that women from the lower-socio-economic strata are primarily home-makers and do not have the educational opportunities to aspire for a certain kind of good life or career. However, through my fieldwork in DDC and public schooling in general, I show that young women across the stratification of the class have aspirations of having a career that in turn would give them financial freedom and mobility. Even though most of the young women do not go on to pursue these dreams, in many ways these fantasies sustain them in the present moment, and fuel hope through possibility.

Similarly, Halvard Vike (2017) postulates that institutions, through marketing goals and values like those discussed above, establish optimistic expectations and generalized trust but are unable to deal with basic concerns. Here he brings in two concepts: utopian time and contemporary time. The latter is the temporal structuring of a dilemma that stems from making promises and fulfilling them. However, the institution is not able to fulfill all these promises which gives rise to utopian time that offers a solution – deferring it to an anticipated, improved future. Such plans instill patience, making actors believe that improvements would materialize even though there is no certainty about that happening. Vike brings in a temporal understanding of the crisis that both he and Berlant are gesturing towards. This future-oriented thinking is premised on the clusters of promises of a better life that can only exist in some other time – not the present.

I evoke Berlant, Ahmed, and Vike to frame an understanding of aspirations that underlie my larger argument. This thesis is not attempting to tell stories of how the good life looks for these young women, but rather how they navigate their present realities and current circumstances. Ethnography allows me to take a bottom-up approach, which itself dismantles grand notions of aspirations and future thinking. Overall, this thesis is looking at what it is like to be a young woman on the cusp of becoming a woman. How is their everyday configured and what does it say about the larger societal dynamics that are at play?

Chapter 1

Day Dreams and Aspirations

“I like to annoy people and tease them for fun in my spare time. I am not on social media because I depend on myself for enjoyment. Even when I’m alone I don’t get bored. I keep daydreaming of all the possibilities that life has to offer [pause] nothing happens of course but it’s nice to be able to have dreams.” Aliya is a 19-year-old college student at Model Town College in Lahore, Pakistan.

The ability to imagine, dream, and desire are all categories that at one level demand to be looked at as a product of a system that relies on producing hopeful futures despite there being little hope for these futures to come (Adams et al. 2009; Berlant 2011). Given the understanding that desire is situated within normative structures of power (Zelizer 2005), I am not looking at whether these dreams or aspirations, terms that I use interchangeably, are achieved. Rather, I am interested in understanding how the individual self is conceived and persisted through dreams and aspirations, or the lack thereof. I would like to evoke Veronica Gago’s (2020) concept of “*potencia*” to frame my understanding of aspirations that runs through this chapter. Building on the writings of Marx and Spinoza, Gago posits *potencia* as a “desiring capacity” (2020: 3). Aliya’s quotation at the start of this chapter embodies that capacity to desire, the ability to think beyond what one can do. Her ability to conceive various possibilities for herself anchors her as a complex figure rooted in certain gendered, classed, and national subjectivities.

Fieldwork in this chapter is based on time spent at two colleges: The Model Town Associate Degree College for Women and the Dharampura Degree College for Women². It

² Names of the colleges have been altered to a nearby location owing to the administrations discomfort in having the college’s name in a research project.

examines the life worlds of teachers and young women who are at the cusp of graduation (and by extension becoming women). A lot of work on public colleges revolves around a lack of resources, nationalist curriculum, and poor learning/ teaching techniques, amongst other issues which are very real and important in their own ways. However, in this chapter, and by extension thesis, I aim to form a narrative around women in public colleges that looks past the overarching themes of being stuck and oppressed by focusing on how they carve ways of *potencia* through aspirations and daydreams.

There is a general perception of educated women as being from the middle class – a deeply fractured category in the present moment of advanced capitalism. However, my thesis shows that quite a lot of these young women are from the working classes – daughters of day laborers, mechanics, janitors etc. There is a certain imagination amongst the privileged classes about who can attend these colleges that excludes women from the lower strata of society who are otherwise seen as homemakers, unable to have upper-class aspirations. This chapter aims to place these individuals within their social networks, thus shedding light on the various negotiations with societal norms and the self.

Situating Aspirations: Negotiating Marital Realities

It was early morning at the Model Town Degree College, and I was made to sit in an empty auditorium where preparations for an event were underway. A few young women had clustered at the door, looking at me periodically while discussing something amongst themselves. My presence had naturally evoked curiosity among the young women in college even as I walked through the halls, following the Vice Principal, the young women would drop everything and stare without blinking until I would leave their sight. I was not dressed in a

uniform but a *shalwar kameez* like the teachers and made sure that I sat on the side to not evoke any notice. However, my strategy was unsuccessful as a few minutes later, six young women made their way to me. Not shy but curious, these young women had a myriad of questions for me. They inquired whether I was their new teacher. I told them that I was not and that I was there for research. They all looked at each other and finally, Malaika broke the silence by saying: “Research? That too in this college? Were you unable to find a better place to research?” They all burst into laughter.

By this time, the young women had already inquired where I went to school, which college I attended for my bachelor's degree, and that I was doing my masters abroad. I do not come from a background in public schooling which made my experiences very different from their everyday realities. While I initially understood my “inside-outsider” (Maqsood 2021) status as a challenge, it later benefitted me as I was familiar with the world views and social circumstances that these young women described given that I was born and raised in Pakistan but also distant enough to form bonds of closeness with the young women that made them share personal details with me. This distance meant that since I was not connected to their family or friend circles, they were more open to sharing their aspirations and desires with me, knowing that it won't escape the confines of our relationship. Similarly, what I initially understood as a dismissal or belittling of their own college through comments such as “why are you here?” and “Could you not find a better place for research” were perhaps an obscure way of pointing out the differences in our class and social capital. Despite that, the young women were intrigued by my presence in their college and through a series of questions tried to understand me through my marital and kin relations.

“Where do you live?” the questions continued.

“Cantonment³”. I replied.

“That’s a nice area to live. How many brothers do you have?”

“One” I replied

“Is he married?” Shabnam asked.

“yes”

“Oh. I was really hoping he wasn’t.”

This was one of the first conversations I had at the college with first-year students just shy of sixteen years of age. Shabnam’s inquiry about my brother came from a place of light-hearted humor veiled in seriousness about her future. The questions that she and her friends posed were nothing short of an inquiry marriage consultants/matchmakers or older women like aunts and grandmothers inquire about.

“How old are you?” they continued with their line of questioning.

They all looked at each other in bewilderment when I told them that I was twenty-six.

“But if you're that old, you must be married and have children?” one of the young women exclaimed.

I told them that I did not have any children. Silence followed as they exchanged curious glances. Most women in the urban Lahore context are married in their early to mid-twenties and usually have a child within their first year of marriage. When the math did not add up, the young women started asking me specific questions:

“When did you get married?” they asked.

“A few months ago,” I informed them.

³ Residential military owned district in Lahore.

“Was it love or arranged?” Malaika chimed in as she moved closer to me

“I met him at university” I replied in a coded manner.

“Love” marriage in Pakistan and South Asia, in general, refers to a partner that one has chosen for themselves as opposed to arranged marriage where the parents decide whom their child is going to marry. In a societal context where marriage is the predetermined future for women, and contact with the opposite sex outside of marriage is looked down upon, very few women are able to marry out of choice (Fuller and Narasimhan 2008, Donner 2002, Osella 2012, Osella and Osella 2000). Parents try to ensure that their daughters are not exposed to the opposite sex [men] by enrolling them in all-young women colleges, not encouraging them to pursue higher education, and monitoring their mobility.

“I knew it. People always find husbands at university. This college is useless.” Shabana exclaimed as she got up from the chair and walked away in frustration. Malaika on the other hand was undeterred. She followed her line of questioning.

“Do your in-laws know that you’re here? Are they *understanding*? Do they allow you to work? Where do they live? Where is your husband? Do you live with your in-laws? Finally, did you always dream of becoming a bride?” She was out of breath and wide-eyed by the end of her last sentence.

Malaika talked about how important it was for women to have an *understanding* with (not of) their in-laws and husband. This use of the English word *understanding* is colloquially referred to as mutual respect offered by the in-laws and the husband along with ease of negotiating some freedom – to usually work outside the home without neglecting household responsibilities. Young women navigating the terrains of their future where marriage is often seen as the next step in a woman’s life are looking to marry into families which are

understanding. Other terms such as “adjustment” (Uberoi and Tyaggi 1994) and “compromise” were also used by these young women to situate and make sense of love marriages within the larger social framework of marriages in Pakistan. The concept of *understanding* sheds light on how young women who have otherwise limited options, navigate economic uncertainty and lack of state support through the institution of marriage (Maqsood 2021).

The aspiration of marriage is partly that of a wedding and its festivities. Malaika’s question of whether I had always dreamed of being a bride is evocative. At one level it brings to the forefront the consumer aspect of becoming a bride, ranging from buying clothes, accessories, shoes, household appliances, etc. On the other hand, being married equals the transition to adulthood, particularly for young women (ibid). Malaika's use of the words “allowed”, and “permission” suggests that my decision to work out of the household, away from my husband and in-laws' direct supervision is utopic and is not the norm. When a woman is married is off, she is expected to stay with her in-laws. Depending on the family size, larger families have multiple siblings staying in the same house with their wives and children. Nuclear families are a rare occurrence and those who do live away from their parents do so because they must move cities because of employment opportunities. Despite that, many still choose to stay in joint families to avoid the high cost of living that a single-income household must incur (Maqsood 2021).

“Marriage is with the family, not the man” sixteen-year-old Malaika elaborated.

Given the social structure of Pakistani society, most of the young women in college knew that marriage is what will provide them with a secure future. The relationship between the state and its citizens is modeled around the kinship network which is seen as an ideal. This contract posits that all subjects are situated within categories of gender and age (Joseph 2005). Despite

that, *understandings* allow for “new conditions of possibilities” (Faier 2007, Maqsood 2021) where young women can enact their desires and imagine new and better futures for themselves. Malaika and Shabnam through their inquiries about my life were looking for opportunities that exist within structures of power and traditional gender roles. The term *understanding* opens doors to shed light on the nuances of how young women make space for their desires and fantasies which include possibilities of romantic love.

Aspirations are assimilated into normative structures and relations and practiced, taught, and re-learned throughout the course of one’s life depending on age and the changing nature of relationships and status (Joseph 2005). Building on Joseph’s notion of changing the nature of aspirations through the course of one’s life, Rubina, a twenty-six-year-old teaching intern, represents a different age demographic than Malaika and Shabnam. She has a two-year-old daughter whom she leaves at the college daycare facility. She explained how her sister had been taking care of her daughter during Rubina’s working hours (8 am to 1 pm) but had refused to continue taking that responsibility. Rubina is married to her aunt’s (father’s sister) son. Her husband works at a shoe manufacturing plant as a mid-level employee. Rubina was also curious about how my husband (and by extension in-laws) allowed me to drive alone and conduct research in an area that was far off from where I lived. She herself lived five minutes away from the college and explained how the choice of going to school and getting married boiled down to convenience, which proximity provides.

“I don’t understand why you come here every day to talk to these young women. They are the same. Talking to one is enough, it's not like they have something interesting to say. Most of these young women come here because they live close by, and the fee of this school is negligible.”

As we continued to walk, she talked about how her legs were cramped. She had just returned from teaching 150 students:

“I had to wash all the dishes, do laundry, and iron all the clothes for the week. I was standing up for hours last night making sure all the clothes were ironed and now my legs are hurting terribly.”

Rubina lived in a joint family with her in-laws. Her husband, daughter, and she lived in one portion of the house while the upstairs was occupied by her husband’s brother. Her father-in-law had passed, and her mother-in-law would decide whom she wants to stay with depending on her mood. Rubina's own mother and sister lived next door too.

During the first few times we talked, Rubina would make an active effort to portray herself as the ideal housewife. She would sit in the staff room and talk about the long hours she spent cooking or cleaning despite having domestic help with pride. However, with time I found out that she is the first woman in her family to step out and work. She got married over two years ago. During this time, she stayed at home and had a child but staying at home all day was unbearable. It became increasingly difficult to be confined to the house and her child. She wanted to “utilize” her MPhil in physics so that her education doesn't go to “waste”. While initially, she denied having any aspirations saying that she was content with where she was in life, later, she unraveled she aspired to apply for a permanent lecturer position. However, for that, she needs to take some government exams, followed by a placement that is always outside Lahore.

“I don’t know how I’ll do it, but I really want to. I just got my check for this teaching internship, and I earned 45000 rupees. It's amazing. I can go shopping whenever I want to and buy my

daughter whatever she wants.”

Rubina’s elder sister was a gold medalist in English Literature who taught at a prestigious public university in Lahore during the first few years of her marriage. However, as she had more children, she had to leave her job and stay at home. Rubina fears that she may fall on the same path but consoles herself by telling me that her sister’s husband has a high-paying government job, so she doesn’t need to work. Justification to work for Rubina was always utilitarian, ranging from not wanting her degree to go to waste and wanting to earn because her husband did not have a high-paying job. Despite rationalizing her aspirations to work, for Rubina having a community of friends and colleagues outside of her home was important for her. She felt unfulfilled in her roles as a mother and a wife which she admitted begrudgingly and with guilt. This guilt was what led to her sharing her stories of long hours of labor to compensate for the joy she experienced when she was away from the home. This complexity that Rubina’s life exhibits is central to understanding that marriage is not an endpoint of aspirations. Despite that, these aspirations come at a cost where women like Rubina must juggle between the responsibilities of being a wife, mother, daughter-in-law, and a working professional all the while making it seem effortless. Finally, Rubina’s narrative demonstrates notions of personhood and aging (Lamb 1997) demonstrating a woman’s changing position in the household as she ages from being a young student (like the young women in college) to a married woman, wife, and mother and how these relationalities add to the complex notions of aspirations and an understanding of the self.

On the Cusp of Adulthood: Future-planning with the Graduating Class

“These young women don’t know what they want to do with their futures. Unlike private school students, we do not have teachers who are available to guide and mentor

these students. As soon as the clock strikes 1:30 in the afternoon, all these teachers run away. They don't want to stay back and mentor these young women. So, I'm telling you right now, asking them what their dreams and aspirations are is futile." - Principal Dharampura College

Two young women were taking pictures of each other in the courtyard, and they noticed me looking at them and said: "Today was our last paper, we're just trying to enjoy. Please let us be."

Maria and Hina were BA students in Social Work. Both were not in their uniforms because they had come to give their last economics exam. I asked them why they chose Social Work and what they planned to do with their degree in the future to which they replied:

"We chose social work because all the other subjects were full and there was no space for enrollment. Plus, we wanted something easy. That being said, we don't really know what social work means in practice. Most of our curriculum was rote learning and textbook scenarios. You know, helping poor and disabled people. I think that kind of work could be interesting. Helping out mentally challenged or old people. It's a lot of (care) work though. The upside is that you end up landing a government job with stable pay and a pension plan plus a government officer rank that comes with any public job. Social status can get you places when you don't have any connections. But I don't know what life has in store for us. We'll see."

As I was talking to these two young women, a third young woman: Hira showed up. She was dressed in a black frock with colorful embroidery. She had light-brown hair tied up in a loose pony. She walked to her friends with a small piece of paper in her hand.

"How was your exam?? I am so glad it's over." she waved the exam paper in her hand.

"Who are you?" She examined me from head to toe.

I told her that I was a researcher.

"How was your exam?" I asked her.

She rolled her eyes: "It was fine. I just must pass. I don't really care for it."

"Do you want to continue your education?" I inquired.

" God NO! I am SO done. I was never interested, to begin with. My family pressurized me."

If you don't want to study, then what do you want to do? Get married? I asked

She was shy at first but replied: "Yes, of course. I am in love with someone but also engaged to my mother's best friend's son. I have tried to get out of this engagement, but my mother is adamant. Actually, the boy that I am in love with is an accounts bookkeeper at a small shop nearby and my family doesn't think he is fit for our socio-economic status."

"What does your fiancé do?" I asked

"He is a chemical engineer at a very well-renowned firm."

"Do you think money is important for a good life?" I inquired

"It's not like Ahmad (the man she loves) goes to sleep hungry. I believe that you can only love once. That's it. There is no way around it. My mother asks me to talk to my fiancé on the phone. Connect with him. Be romantic and all but I am not interested. Why should I talk to him?"

Hira sees the dissonance in not being allowed to pursue her own romantic interests but being cajoled to be romantic and have a relationship with a man of her parent's choosing before marriage and refuses to comply. "All I know is that I will not be marrying a chemical engineer. How boring is that? What's the point of money and stability if there is no love? No excitement. Nothing to look forward to." She asked me.

A fourth young woman joined. Mira was wearing a headscarf and had just finished her exam.

"She is not going to marry that engineer" Mira had overheard our conversation.

"She is going to help me" Hira nudged Mira alluding to elopement or some grand refusal.

"No, no she is just joking" Mira nervously laughed.

Public colleges are often depicted as spaces where gendered, nationalist subjects are produced with aspirations of class mobilities. However, this chapter aims to disrupt that notion as Hira demonstrates that money does not hold significance but the power to choose who you love

matters. Before Hina, Rubina demonstrates how following the conventional trajectory of getting your degree, arranged marriage, and having children are not things that have brought her fulfillment. Most of the young women that I talked to understood that there was no escaping marriage but everyone that I talked to was looking for ways to negotiate through resistance or other ways of being.

Daydreaming as an Escape from the Everyday

My visit to the Model Town College coincided with an event on the environment of Pakistan. The Vice-Principal (VP), who was skeptical of my presence, had asked me to bring something tangible like surveys after I had explained to her that I was looking to carry out an ethnography. She said that I had to show up to the event so that I could see how government colleges were organizing informational sessions for young and malleable minds. Her demeanor was warm when we were alone, and we managed to make some small talk. She asked me more about my project and she responded by saying that she was also a researcher at her previous job where she supervised MA and Ph.D. students. I asked her how long she had worked here, and she said: only a month. She was new here and this was her first attempt at a high admin-level position, and she wanted to make a good impression.

“This auditorium hasn’t been used in years. I’m just trying to find a way for the students to engage with something outside the classroom. Plus, an Islamic perspective on the environment of Pakistan will only help these young women in the future,” the principal explained.

During the event, to which I will dedicate a separate section in another chapter, the VP had given me the heads up to have my surveys filled. Four proctors took charge and distributed

my surveys to third and fourth-year students. Aliya was one of the proctors who had taken the lead. She went through the survey herself first with very focused and business-like expressions. After she had flipped through the pages, she burst into laughter and said: “Do you really think these young women will understand so much English?”

This was an English-medium institution where the administrative forms, curriculum, attendance, and everything was in the English language. The surveys that I had designed were in simple, straightforward language. I had my mother, who herself was a product of a government BA college of her time, go through the surveys. We had to revise them multiple times, but I was sure that I had gotten it right. Some of the suggestions that my mother had given me included: not leaving open-ended questions because writing puts off students, so we kept it short. Yes and No answers only. Detailed questions required various possible answers in the options so they could select from them. I had done it all but even that was a struggle. Aliya and I went through the survey questions, and she would read a question and repeat it in Urdu to make sure she had gotten it right. Other proctors would come up to me to ask what various questions meant and I would guide them through it in Urdu.

While everyone was filling out their surveys and the speaker was going through his slides, Aliya stood next to me and started talking to me. She was friendly, polite, and confident. She asked me about my background: where I was from, and what I had studied. She kept thinking I was a Psychology student because a few months ago a young woman from Punjab University had come over to get some Psychology surveys filled out. She asked me if I was hungry. I said I wasn't, but she insisted that I have her lunch that she made herself before coming to college. As soon as the event ended, she took me upstairs and said that we should sit in an empty class. I told her that the principal had asked me strictly to stay away from the classrooms.

Then she suggested that we sit on terrace-like steps which overlooked the central courtyard below, but they were so crowded that I asked her to take me downstairs to the big lawn which was the central gathering area for students. The main ground was crowded with young women sitting in groups or playing badminton or having lunch. There was a circular brick house-like structure which Aliya told me was the canteen which has been closed since covid. However, even before that, the *theka* (rent and utilities) charged by the college was so much that no one could afford it for more than a few months. Currently, the canteen was closed, and the students sat on the steps around it to gossip and/or have lunch. Amna opened her blue lunchbox which had cartoons on the lid. She had neatly folded a *paratha* (whole wheat bread) and *anda* (eggs) in tissue paper. There was also some *achaar* (pickles) in it. I wasn't really hungry but Aliya had extended a gesture of friendship by sharing her food with me and it would have been rude for me to refuse. I took a bite as Aliya disappeared, looking for her friends. I was left alone with her blue lunch box and a crowd of young women who had dropped everything to look at me as I ate the *anda-paratha*. I ate a little but then closed the lunch box as Aliya came back. She asked me why I hadn't eaten all of it to which I responded that I couldn't finish all her food. She, however, was smarter than that and made fun of how I was scared/anxious to sit here as all the young women stared at me. She said that I had a point because the students and teachers here don't hesitate in registering a complaint, no matter how made-up or hyperbolic it is.

After sharing her food, Aliya decided to give me a tour of the school. She was fond of talking and was not hesitant in sharing tales of her college. She started our conversation by mentioning how the college had a lot of scandals. I asked her what she meant by scandals? She narrated an incident where two young women were caught in sexual acts in the bathrooms of an old building called *khanddar* (ruins). She went on to say how this was common in all-young

women colleges. She even knew the details including how the young women were wearing nighties and were caught in a bathroom stall by other young women who had informed the admin. The admin called the young women's parents. One of the young women's mothers said calmly that she knew that her daughter is a lesbian, and that the admin should send her home from school if they have a problem. Aliya also mentioned that there were certain classrooms where young women smoked in secret and that the admin knew but they can only do so much. Additionally, since it is a government college, they are very afraid of media attention or scandals. Young women often make videos and threaten to share them on social media to expose the college which makes the administration very nervous. They would do anything to make sure no one complains to the media, Aliya explained. If word got out regarding a scandal at a public college, the principal and staff at that college would be met with a lot of scrutiny from the government – which is something that they must avoid at all costs. This may result in a reduction in annual funding or even worse, letting go of someone from the administrative staff.

Across the ground, there was a huge tin shed under which was a heaping pile of wooden chairs shabbily covered by an old and dirty white cloth. Aliya noticed that I was looking at it and explained how these were all the classrooms' damaged chairs that the government would take away and fix. Aliya had been in that college for four years. She knew everything and everybody. She was a very insightful interlocutor. She came from a small family in Pak Arab society – residential developments in the outskirts of Lahore. Her father had a dye business and she only had one sister who was married. Her husband was a lecturer for BA students, and he also taught at a government college and gave tuition classes in the evening at their home. Her sister's husband had no family so Aliya's parents had supported him, helped him build a house near them, and loaned him space to carry out evening classes for extra money. Quoting her mother

Aliya said: “After all, she is our daughter, if we won't take care of her then who will?” Aliya also mentioned in passing that she was engaged to this man in Australia. However, her mother doesn't want to send her so far away. I asked her why she was engaged if the family wasn't intending to move forward with the process and she just shrugged.

Most young women, including Aliya, loathed the fact that they had to attend this college and their reasons for going here ranged from: their siblings/relatives went here, it has a reputation for being a space where respectable middle-class women get their education from, it was closer to their house and commute was something that everyone emphasized on. Their aspiration to choose a college that was far away was not accommodated by their parents. Furthermore, most of them wanted to continue their education as long as it was in another college like Kinnaird College or Punjab University.

While talking to another young women, who was Aliya's friend, I found out that these young students must decide which college they want to go to during tenth grade. According to Meeral, most pupils including her just follow their friends. They don't know much about which college is good. It boils down to things like commute and friendships. The main decision comes after the first two years when most students want to leave this college and go to four-year universities instead of staying back and opting for a two-year BA. Meeral deeply aspired to pursue a degree in Medical Lab Technology:

“I really wanted to do a degree in MLT (Medical Lab Technician) but the merit was too high for government universities and private colleges cost around 11-1500,000 rupees and we're not *landlords*. After that plan fell through, I decided to give up. I really did not feel like studying. My family was very worried. Finally, my father sat me down and explained how I was being unreasonable and that I should just continue with a BA in this college.”

Meeral's unattainable desires are what led her and most of her other peers back to this college. She had made peace with her father's decision to stay back. She talked about how this college was not too bad and that it offered more subjects than most colleges in the area – but she couldn't refrain from sighing as she talked.

These young women come from families with traditional hierarchies of patriarchal households – the mother and sisters are restricted to the domestic space while the father and brothers are found to be outside the home for most of the day. They are not allowed to go outside of the home unless the family goes out for food, or they have female cousins over. Aliya talked about how she never left the house because she didn't have a brother and her father was busy with work, so she never bothered asking her mother for permission. She says:

“I like to annoy people and tease them for fun in my spare time. I am not on social media because I depend on myself for enjoyment. Even when I'm alone I don't get bored. I keep daydreaming of all the possibilities that life has to offer [pause] nothing happens of course but it's nice to be able to have dreams.”

Usually dismissed as trivial, the act of daydreaming gives Aliya the room to escape and experiment. Daydreaming gives her the option to exercise the faculty of hope. This happier and smarter version of herself in her dreams builds up a desire for a better life than what this college provides. In a follow-up conversation with Aliya, she talked about what her day looked like:

“I wake up at around 11/12 pm. I do not go to college these days because honestly what's the point? I don't feel like it anymore. After I wake up, I have breakfast and then I help children with their homework – do you remember I told you that my mother runs a home academy downstairs? I try to help with whatever is needed. My sister's husband does the main part of the teaching. He is a professor. We even have BA students come in the evening. But I help the younger students

of course. Actually, I sometimes teach Matric⁴ students' math.

“I used to play teacher-teacher when I was young. My mother reminds me about this, but you know what they say: no matter how much you dream, you will have to wake up. I often think about what I can do but then I open my eyes and wake up and everything becomes scattered again.”

Whenever asked about what she would like to do after she graduated, Aliya would shrug her shoulders. She would talk about dreams and ambition as concepts that were different from reality. Life was laid out for her and her sister. They would go to school and college, and then eventually the main goal would be marriage. To that end, aspirations provided comfort in the form of daydreams. This was not true for all young women according to Aliya: “Now I shouldn't be saying this but these *Ghareeb larkiyan* (poor young women) have to work extra hard. They are the ones who are top in class. Not everyone has their father's business to support them.”

Dua would call her for hours on end. She would complain about her father and their frugal lifestyle. He wouldn't allow her to wear jeans to the spring festival – an annual event hosted by their college. Aliya laughed as she narrated Dua's woes. She sided with Dua's father by commenting on how Dua shouldn't be wearing jeans given her body size. Aliya talked about Dua with distaste. She was always complaining about her *ghurbat* (poverty) and finding anyone who would listen to her. Once Dua wrote all of her woes on a notebook and slipped it to Aliya in the library. Aliya flipped through the notebook with indifference and returned it to Dua after a few hours. Dua asked her if she had read it to which Aliya responded with a nod. She hadn't actually read it. She wasn't interested in her stories. For Aliya, Dua was the problem. That's why she got into so much trouble at home. Dua's attempt to form a connection with Aliya through

⁴ 9th and 10th-grade students

sharing personal grievances caused by financial hardships was not reciprocated. This lack of empathy exhibited by Aliya is doing two things: it is categorizing Dua as the whining poor subject who should be grateful for everything she has while at the same time distinguishing herself as a class apart.

Throughout my conversations with Aliya, she would remind me how her father was a businessman and how she lived a comfortable life. Whenever I asked her if she had dreams of having a job, earning for herself, or marrying someone who was well-off, she would seem a little taken aback and respond with: “I told you, *we* have a business.”

Aliya’s father had a dye business. She was very tight-lipped in giving extra details about the nature of his work or his educational background. From what I gathered; he supplied powdered dye to various businesses that required it. Compared to Aliya’s peers in college, her family was financially well off. When asked about her mother’s educational background, she said:

“My mother is the principal of the academy that we run in our house. We have a big house. The three of us live upstairs because we don’t require much space. As the principal, she must have some qualifications (educational) right? She probably has a BA ... maybe. No one goes around telling people how much they’ve studied. My father has never disclosed this. My mother has told me that she’s taught before she got married. I have a *khala* (mother’s sister) who has an MBA. She lives in England.”

Aliya’s meandering answers regarding her parent's educational background reveal two things: she was trying to prove that she belonged to a good middle-class family and that even though she had family members who had MAs and MBAs, they weren’t necessary. Her aunt lives in England but is a housewife. Aliya’s only sister is a year older than her and is married to the Professor who teaches at her mother’s academy. The sister and her husband live nearby in a house that was given by Aliya’s parents. The husband’s parents passed away and has no relatives. In the absence of a son, Aliya’s parents have taken in their son-in-law, provided him with a home, and

included him in the family business. Aliya told me that she was engaged to a man in Australia, but her mother called the wedding off. “She can’t send me far away,” Aliya explains in a matter-of-fact way.

Aliya’s household is a place of various assemblages (Rodriguez 2010). As she is talking to me on Zoom, I can hear the TV in the background, her mother chiming in from the distance (I can’t make out what she says). The academy downstairs is open for business as we are talking in the evening, and I can hear movement and chatter. Aliya’s eyes are constantly darting from the to a space in front of her. She is managing the rhythms of the household which is also a place of business without interrupting her conversation with me.

Aliya is a few months away from her final exams in May. She has failed her mock tests, taken in preparation for these board⁵ exams. Shadowing her disappointment, she explains how everyone she knows has failed these exams. Blames it on the teachers and administration. Does not know what is wrong with them. She thinks that they were trying to teach them a lesson but it didn’t work. Now there is some talk about re-testing. Aliya is not intrigued by this news and tells me that will probably not go to college any longer. The college has given them a card. She calls it the university card which is issued by the Punjab University – the central body with which all these small colleges are connected in the Punjab education network. By giving them this card preemptively, despite most of the students failing their exams, the college has given these young women a free pass. Most of these young women will take the board exam. They will pass in some subjects. Fail in others. They can re-take them for a small fee as many times as they like. Aliya’s mother has a BA but she is not sure if she passed all her exams. It doesn’t matter. Very few of these young women go on to study at the university level where they join the third year of a

⁵ The Punjab Board of Education is responsible for conducting and creating all government and private BA exams. These exams are referred to as board exams or final exams.

traditional four-year bachelor's degree. Aliya may go on to do a course or diploma in ultrasound technology. But she is not sure:

“I have a lot of *jazbeh* (spirit, feeling, passion, desire, sentiment, emotion). Someone will tell me to join the army, I'll want to do that. Someone else will ask me to become a doctor, I'll want to do that, etc. I like the idea of going to college, buying new books, and dreaming of something but I don't like studying. All my friends and most of the young women in my college are the same.”

Aliya's use of the term *jazbeh* (singular: *jazbah*) is important. She attempts to explain it by telling me that if someone were to challenge her, she would prove that she really is good at studying, but she doesn't feel like it. While I initially understood *jazbeh* as having unfulfilled aspirations, I later realized that Aliya was trying to tell me that she was not someone who was without passion or unable to desire. My conversations with her and other young women unraveled a coming to terms with what they desired from college life and what they received. Her four years here have been unrewarding. There is no food on campus. No fun activities. She cannot even leave campus before 1 pm when the classes end. She almost felt cheated. When she was younger, she would see her elder sister and cousins talk about their day at college and imagine all the possibilities that awaited her in college. She would get excited but it's not the same anymore. The fantasy of being young and carefree was not only unfulfilled by the college but was obstructed by it.

To that end, these *jazbeh* that she talks about are not empty feelings. Despite these layers of regulatory mechanisms, these young women actively step back from the burdens of schoolwork and attending classes to imagine not only different futures for themselves but also the present. I would like to evoke the notion of *potencia* (Gago 2020) that I started this chapter with to further elaborate on my point. By *potencia* I do not mean power over the structures that dominate these young women but rather the power to imagine alternative realities. Instead of being glued to her

cell phone, scrolling on social media, Aliya chooses boredom and daydreaming. This is an activity that requires isolation from social norms and structures that pull her back into heteronormative power relations or reality. This presence of *Jazbeh* or *potencia* leaves room for reflection and critical understanding of her surroundings. *Jazbeh* evolve throughout life and so can be seen as a process of sustaining hope. Kathy Weeks, frames hope in opposition to fear and anxiety. Institutional structures of the state mirrored in the college promote fearful and anxious subjectivities. Young women who stay within the lines of order and normativity are rewarded while others are punished. Aliya, however, embodies the “hopeful subject” (ibid 198) despite her college experience. She will probably not join the army or become a doctor, even a teacher but she likes the option to be able to have these dreams. These aspirations sustain her through a life that has already been laid out for her.

Aspirations then have a specific role in creating national subjects. The state serves a particular role in education where it provides mediocre instruction and space for those who do not have the money or the grades to make it to private and public universities. These *leftovers*, make a large population of Pakistani youth that is left to fend for themselves. The question of men who go on to graduate with these diplomas is a completely separate one. The working-class economy is set up for them as office clerks or other jobs at that level, while the rest battle unemployment. Women, on the other hand, are handed off to the structures of family and home. Aspiring for opportunities that are not tailored for them, these young women navigate a complicated terrain between the home, college, and the outside.

Outside Aspirations of Marriage: Other ways of Being

Samiya is a senior physics teacher at Dharampura college with over 14 years of teaching

experience and she explains the lives of public college young women in Pakistan:

“I have spent most of my career teaching young women in poor *tehsils*⁶ in Multan who wore head scarfs and had meek personalities but were very smart. Now if you see the Lahori young women, they will be wearing a dupatta on their shoulders instead of their heads. These young women would help at home full-time and also attend college. This meant that they would get up at dawn, get breakfast started for their parents and many brothers and sisters, clean up, and then come to college only to go back and resume the household responsibilities for the rest of the day. Because they are single-handedly running their homes on their labor, their parents are hesitant to send these young women to college. However, these young women still managed to get into this two-year BA which for them and their families is the highest level of education possible. A four-year college is out of the question. The parents are afraid that if they get too much education, they might ask for their *haqooq* or rights. This is also the reason why so many parents deny science education as well. Arts and other subjects don't make them think too much.”

Expanding on this logic, she talks about how her own parents were hesitant about sending her for her master's degree. "I was the first young women to do a master's in my family.”

Samiya has only been working in Lahore for about a year. Having taught for fourteen years in Multan, Samiya had always aspired to experience life in the big city. She lives on Park view Multan Road, a residential community on the outskirts of Lahore. When I asked her if she lived alone, she said that she lived with her brother. There was a little hesitation in her tone. Perhaps her brother commuted between Lahore and Multan frequently. She didn't reveal much detail about her daily life at home. Maybe because she did live alone as living alone (for a woman) is not a norm.

Samiya embarks on a long journey every day, five days a week as she makes her to college. She first takes a public bus or a rickshaw from where she lives to Thokar Niaz Baig which is the first stop of the Orange Train (In the metro system). "When I first started to travel in

⁶ Tehsils are subdivisions of larger districts which in this case is the city of Multan – located four hours south of Lahore in the province of Punjab.

the public bus, I used to put cotton in my ears. I couldn't get used to the noise and the rhythms of the city. I don't enjoy this long commute at all. It's very taxing."

The fast pace of Lahore's life as compared to Multan has been difficult for Samiya. She had aspirations to live in the big city and carve a life for herself outside of her family back in Multan but these dreams have been contaminated much like the air, produce, food, and water.

"The fruits here are fake. I once bought a peach, but it tasted like an apricot. That's the thing about Lahore, about big cities I guess, you will never get what you thought you were getting. Whether it's the air or food everything is contaminated. Therefore, I live on the outskirts of the city. When I'm going back after work, I can feel the smell and texture of the air change closer to home.

I really liked working and living in Multan, but it was time for a change. I have always been like this. When I think of something I end up doing it and my family supports it. I wanted to know what it was like to live in a big city. So, far there is a lot of two-timing in business practices. Even when I go and buy bread, it tastes like cardboard.

Mera Shaher (my city referring to Multan) is *Khalis* (pure). I don't have to watch my back all the time. The food, the service, the atmosphere, everything is pure. I always get my *halwa* (sweet dish made from semolina) from Multan. It's the best.

I've been in Lahore for a year and I haven't been able to adjust well. I came here because I wanted to live in a city where they had a secretariat. The funny thing is that now they are building on Multan too.

I can always smell smoke; she said pointing towards the mask on her chin. It's not something I can get used to. People around me don't know what I'm talking about."

Samiya was engaged to be married to her cousin but due to some familial tensions, which she refused to disclose, the marriage never took place. This gave Samiya the opportunity to teach. Now that all her four siblings are married and have their own lives, Samiya chose to move to Lahore in order to make space for herself outside of her married siblings and aging parents who are always concerned about her marriage. She isn't against marriage. In fact, she gives her colleagues sound marriage advice on how to keep their husbands and in-laws happy. She has embraced the role of an elder sister in the teachers' staffroom where she listens to her colleagues complain about their domestic lives and in return, she offers them sensible advice. In doing so, she has carved a space for herself in a women's college where most of the faculty is comprised of

women who are married with children. Her younger colleagues would share their problems with in-laws or husbands with her, looking for an empathetic ear to vent to. While she would sit in with her elder colleagues, willing to learn from them in case she would get married in the future. This way, Samiya would fit in with all groups of women on the staff.

Samiya was the only single woman that I met, who was in her mid to late thirties. She presents this possibility of being that is different from most other teachers who are constantly absorbed in their domestic lives. While Samiya must make an extra effort with her colleagues so as to not come off as different, she is also perhaps the only teacher who takes out the time to mentor and help students with problems of harassment, family matters, convincing parents to make their daughters finish their education amongst other ways in which she is there for these young women. Samiya is the *potencia* as she exhibits alternate ways of being in Pakistani society.

In this chapter, I looked at how various configurations of aspirations come together to disrupt the notion that public college education is producing docile subjects. Various conversations with young women of different ages reveal that apart from being stuck, these women are contesting categories of being good Muslim, and Pakistani women in different ways. The college is a space of respite from domestic work and responsibilities that all these women must bear no matter how young or old they are. It is also a space where female friendships offer comfort and hope, and the next chapter will deal more extensively on how time pass, fun, and frivolous activities make room for these women to be themselves which is not always possible.

Chapter 2

Navigating the Mundane: Re-thinking Fun, Frivolity, and Time Pass

Routines that we take for granted, interactions that we forget about, and the multitude of relationalities contained within the everyday offer a rich variety of material for investigation. During my fieldwork, I spent countless hours asking young women what they did for fun or how they spent their time between classes or during recess and I would get the same answer repeatedly: “nothing”. Initially thinking of this as a dead end, I returned to this theme as it was quite odd that “nothing” was an acceptable response for people across colleges to say when asked what they do for fun. In this chapter, I explore through my time spent with these young women how the doing of nothing unfolds and what does it unravel? I look at how young women navigate this new landscape of college through the lens of frivolity by bunking classes, and not following social protocols of wearing the right kind of uniform among other minor transgressions. I start this chapter by looking at how through acts of non-conformity, young women are figuring out how much they can get away with while choosing to conform at other times. The second section analyses how these young women must sit in a classroom with 130 other students, trying to listen to a teacher without a mike, in a room with either no electricity or just one fan. In this context, they would rather be proctors or hall monitors, allowing them to be out and about without having to attend class or get in trouble. Finally, in the last two sections, I explore the space of the teachers' staff room followed by my time spent with three best friends to illustrate how a lot is happening when doing nothing.

Re-examining Transgression and Discipline

It was ten in the morning and preparations for an event on the environment of Pakistan were underway at the Model Town Associate Degree College for Women in Lahore. A few students were huddled around the entrance of an auditorium waiting for their turn to audition for the *naat* (a popular practice in South Asian cultures based on the poetry of Prophet Muhammad) recitation that usually precedes the event. A teacher in a beige *shalwar kameez* was seated comfortably on the sofa with her legs crossed. She was calling the names of the young women one by one to audition for the spot without looking up from her register. The second call to audition went out and a scrawny young woman with a slight deliberate hunch stood in front of the teacher. She was wearing a black hoodie with the hood on her head to compensate for her absence of a *dupatta* (is a scarf that is seen as a sign of modesty) – something the teacher made a point to lecture her on. The uniform was a plain white *shalwar kameez* and this young women's outfit had a green lace/stripe at the base of her shirt⁷. Shabana had paired it with white sneakers which she had decorated with hand-made black stars on the outside of the shoes. She started singing and immediately stood out. She had a beautiful voice, and she wasn't afraid to hold back. However, the teacher did not seem impressed and kept stopping her mid-way – whenever she would hit a perfect high note with utmost confidence. Shabana was, on the other hand, undeterred.

The teacher's constant quips directed toward Shabana's audition were my first introduction to everyday policing. Students complained about their teachers not showing up for a

⁷ The school uniforms have different colored ribbons for different classes. A standard government degree college in Pakistan has four levels (first-year = green, second-year = yellow, third-year = blue, fourth-year = red) The first and second years correspond to the eleventh and twelfth years of secondary education or high school while the third and fourth years correspond to the bachelor's level. This is the four-year structure that government school students are accustomed to which means that they graduate by the time they are 20 which is also the ideal marriageable age.

class or keeping count of the daily attendance on the occasions that they did show up to teach. This meant that most students would skip classes if they wanted to – and they did. The teaching staff, on the other hand, want not just indolent. They were dedicated to the education of mannerisms and etiquette outside the classroom. Government degree colleges have the highest number of enrollments at the level of higher education in Pakistan. The fee for one year of the BA program is 4,500 rupees (19.62 USD). This gives the public higher education system broader access to the working and middle classes. More importantly, these colleges are seen as spaces where young women learn to become women. Public education in Pakistan has always had a huge burden to carry with a burgeoning young population and an increasingly limited budget making the quality of education subpar. One of my first conversations with the Vice Principal of Dharampura College was as follows:

"A lot of young women come in here looking to be a hero. They think they can save these college young women from the "oppressions" (as they say it nowadays) of a government college but the truth is that we work with what we have. We are allotted a very limited budget by the government and we have to work around it. Despite that, we do a pretty good job at making sure that these young women get a degree for a fraction of the price of a private college or university. So, I urge you to please respect that."

Research narrative on public higher education usually focuses on a lack of resources and funding. My fieldwork was particularly situated within the Covid era when schools and colleges were closed for long periods of time with no foresight into when they would open. While most of the young women who complained about the college being *farigh*⁸ (useless) in terms of teaching or learning would later re-think this notion as the college as a physical space proved to be more than just a place where they attended classes. Rumi from Dharampura College talked about how difficult it was to stay at home for a whole year:

⁸ Farigh is an Urdu word that literally translates into free but in colloquial Urdu, it has multiple connotations. When a person is farigh, it refers to joblessness while farigh in this context refers to a place not offering you anything.

“We would have lecturers uploaded on YouTube and sometimes online classes. It was difficult to study from home, there would either be no space to sit in silence and attend a lecture or internet connectivity issues. Going to college is important because I get to meet my friends every day and get respite from household chores. We are five siblings and being the eldest, I must help my mother out with cooking and cleaning. With all of us home, the workload doubles, and studying is out of the question.”

Rumi like many other young women in the college talked about how they would pass time over a *samosa* (fried pastry with potato filling) and talk about their lives during their free time in-between classes or when they were not attending classes. When I first began my fieldwork, I was looking from a place of oppression and being stuck – a lens of subjectification that ethnographies of women in poor neighborhoods often get stuck with. Recent literature in the field of ethnography has suggested that many researchers are limited to certain questions when studying poor, urban women in the global south to frame them as oppressed or trapped (Kirmani 2020). However, what I found during my time at the colleges was that the young women did not see themselves as being stuck in the way my questions were framing them to be. To that end, this growing literature on fun, enjoyment, and pleasure in the past few years has pushed us to think past overarching categories of analysis and look at what happens in-between major life events. What happens when nothing is happening? *Mazaa* (fun) helps us understand fun as a point of entry into the dynamic world of individuals who are often categorized as subjectified or oppressed (Anjaria and Anjaria 2020). For cities like Lahore, where women are often seen in domestic roles within the house, *Mazaa* allows us to explore how these women live complex lives outside of the physical and emotional labor of sustaining a household.

Shabana’s introduction at the beginning of this chapter is a great example of how fun enables life to be more enjoyable despite the technologies of monitoring and disciplining that are constantly at play at home and at college. Shabana is a young sixteen-year-old who is asked to

dress and behave like a modest woman but beyond that is using the *naat* recitation, which is a culturally religious practice, to perform like a singer on television or social media. The performative aspects including singing on a high note by moving her body to the sound of her voice are her way of enjoying herself at ten in the morning instead of having to sit in class and take a lecture that she describes as “boring”.

My time spent with Shabana was following her chase *mazaa* in her day. As I walked with her, I noticed six seniors were constantly surveilling their juniors like Shabana. They had a red sash with the words *proctor* embroidered in white on it. Shabana explained how these young women were responsible for disciplining students for speaking too loudly or disrupting the class/hallways etc. However, the proctors used their power to get whatever they wanted. Shabana exclaimed ferociously that it was all a matter of *attitude* – an embodiment of disciplinary power that made everyone scared (or at least cautious) of them. Shabana asked me if I thought she had that kind of *attitude*. Proctors were excused from attending the first twenty minutes of class as part of their duties included making sure that everyone was in class. However, this task was done half-heartedly and many times, proctors would skip class altogether or wander in halls chatting. For Shabana the *attitude* that she attributed to the proctors was one of being transgressionary despite being in a position of discipline. Transgression for the sake of transgression was exhausting to execute given the multi-layer surveillance that the college had with the teachers, proctors, security guards, and administrative staff constantly monitoring students. Being a proctor allowed young women like Shabnam to enjoy themselves in between these modes of discipline. Teachers and administration trusted the proctors to do their duties and would not really care for times they were slacking or not in class as managing hundreds of students alone is a difficult task. To that end, teachers were willing to turn a blind eye to minor lapses as long as

these young women were helping them manage their overpopulated classes.

The hierarchies of discipline at both colleges were similar with the proctors being the first layer of surveillance. The proctors were superseded by clerical staff including members who would perform odd jobs like photography, impromptu event management, and secretary-level jobs. These individuals were superseded by the teaching staff and the final layer at the top was the vice-principal and principal.

For instance, the only man on the college staff apart from the security guard, peon, and the accounting office personnel is the photographer: Mr. Asad. Shabana walks up to him and asks him if he can do a photo shoot for her. He asks her to show up behind the abandoned canteen, next to the water tank in an hour. Her friends warn her to not trust this man, but she ignores their cautious remarks and takes one of her friends along with her to have her photos taken. The young women warning Shabana exhibit a strong sense of self-surveillance. They all look at each other signaling their mistrust of men who make such demands. Everyone warns Shabana and her friend to not go behind the water tank. They are concerned about these young women being caught. The rest of the young women mentioned how other students keep a lookout for minor misdemeanors. Tattling⁹ is the norm. It is encouraged by the teachers. For Shabana, however, getting her pictures taken is not a big deal: “Getting your pictures taken is not a big deal. We can’t keep sitting around, being afraid of everyone. It’s fun to get your photos taken even if it’s in front of a water tank.”

The following day Shabana comes up to me with a bunch of developed (hard copies) photos. As I was going through the stack, Arifa comes along and stands next to me, showing off her proctor sash. I asked her where she got the sash from, and she said that she had been elected.

⁹ I avoid using the word snitching which is usually reserved for criminal activities and has a stronger connotation to it.

I was a little perplexed because the last time we had a conversation, that sash was reserved for the seniors. Arifa clarified my confusion and explained how the teachers could make anyone the proctors if they felt like the senior young women were low in numbers or not doing their jobs. The process of selection was in-class based on popularity (gauged by a show of hands) and basic academic criteria. I turned to Shabana and asked her where her sash was. The last time we talked, we knew that she had the *attitude* to become a proctor. Shabana flipped through the photographs and said that she almost won but her teacher didn't want her to. Arifa chimed in: "Shabana had the highest number of votes ever. You would not believe it. But the teacher decided that she was going to give the sash to someone else because Shabana's marks were a bit low."

I asked what the academic criteria were and how short Shabana fell on that scale but they both shrugged. The teacher decides the criteria. It's different for everyone. The ambiguous nature of the proctor selection was intriguing as popularity was just one metric of the decision-making process. It all boiled down to what the teachers decided. "They just want puppets. None of the teachers like me here because I like having fun," shouted Shabana.

This incident raises an important question regarding the implications of fun. Shabana's ability to transgress multiple terrains of power in the mundane, every day is what places her at the center of the process of becoming a woman. Every interaction with Shabana I would frame as transgression was not seen as such by her. The following day, as I was sitting outside the principal's office, I saw Shabana talking to Mr. Asad. Standing tall with his hands clasped on his back, he was wearing a white waist coat on a black *shalwar kameez*. He did not meet her gaze but would say something with a sly smile as Shabana tried to get a hold of her pictures. There was quite a bit back and forth that ended with him giving her the pictures for some cash in exchange. The presence of this only male figure that has direct interactions with female students

is quite common in women's colleges. Most of these men are well-known across the walls of other campuses. They are in charge of multiple things and are known for their sycophantic relationships with the principal and senior faculty members. Mr. Asad would self-appoint himself to oversee mundane activities that needed little supervision. He would point his finger in the air as if he were giving the custodial staff precise directions, though they often ignore him. While placing himself at the forefront of the school's daily activities, Mr. Asad assumed the responsibility of policing as well. What the proctors and teachers missed; he would catch. I was sitting in the principal's office when he barged into the office with a young woman following him: "Madam, do you know what this young woman was up to? Tell her what you were up to?" The young women did not respond. She did not show any remorse but was waiting for this ordeal to be over. "She was hanging from a tall tree. Can you believe it, Madam? Had she fallen and broken her leg or arm, we would have been responsible." The principal was unamused but kept up the line of questioning and asked the young women why she was up on the tree. To which she replied: "We were playing badminton and our shuttlecock got stuck up there. I told Mr. Asad that, I do not understand why he is making such a big deal out of it?" The principal stared at her for a minute and let her go with a warning. Mr. Asad left the room with a look of disappointment. He expected some sort of punishment.

All the young women that I talked to would complain about him. He looked for reasons to penalize students, had the habit of flirting with senior students, and kept very close ties with the staff and faculty. This role of the only male figure in a young women's college is essential for the notion of policing that is instilled in these young adult women so that by the time they leave and interact with the space outside, they are used to it. Everyone agreed how he made life hard but no one bothered to do anything tangible about it. However, the young women were not

scared of him and knew how to work around this power dynamic. They had their groups and would stand up to him as Shabana or the young women on the tree did. They knew that the worst thing that his man was capable of was taking them to the principal, whom they were also not afraid of. Mr. Asad knew that as well. Therefore most of the arguments took place outside in the courtyard or the lawn and would also be resolved by the end of the day.

Despite this multi-layered surveillance, the young women found outlets to have fun whether it was getting their pictures taken, being a proctor and not attending classes, playing badminton, finding secret nooks and crannies at the college to talk, or just having a *samosa*. Public space is mostly a male domain in Pakistan and most of these young women are usually restricted in their daily routines that oscillate between being in college and being at home. To that end, the college provides the physical space for women to experiment with fun and frivolity in ways that they cannot at home. While talking to one of the senior teachers at Dharampura College, I found out:

“Most of the parents of these young women are not concerned about how well their daughters are doing as long as they are passing and staying out of trouble. When they do get into trouble, we must be very careful with how to approach the parents. Sometimes parents can be violent and abusive with their daughters because they don’t have time to parent them. It is usually the mothers who are called in and whenever they come to the office, they are in a hurry to leave because they have a lot of housework to tend to. They usually give us permission to punish their daughters however we see fit and leave.”

This excerpt from a conversation with the teacher shows how having fun at home is usually not possible which is why college is a space where they get to make friends and be young in a way that is not possible elsewhere. Having discussed fun and how it shows up in structures of discipline, I would now like to shift gears to frivolity. What happens when nothing is happening? For this, I want to focus on intimate spaces where teachers congregate as they wait for their next class or their shift to be over. In particular, I will be focusing on one of the staff

rooms and the Vice Principal's office which was the only office in the college with air conditioning apart from the principal's office which had two air conditioners and was three times the size of its counterpart.

Fostering Communities of Friendship and Respite: Staff Room and the Vice Principal's Office

During my fieldwork at Dharampura College, I spent hours waiting in the Vice Principal's office which was connected to a staff room through a yellow door shown in figure 1 (a) below. In front of the door was a metal cabinet that was numbered and locked – a feature that was persistently seen on all pieces of furniture (figure 1 (b) chair) at both the colleges where I conducted fieldwork in. Opposite the metal cabinet was the restroom, the cleanest one as it was connected to the Vice Principal's office and would be cleaned every two hours or so.

The staff room pictured below was usually empty as it was a make-shift space that served as a pantry and a waiting room for teachers and janitorial staff who were responsible for setting up laboratory experiments in the adjoining room on the left (figure 1 (a) for reference).



Figure 6 (a) Staff Room/Lab and Figure 6 (b) Staff Room/ Lab

Most of the teachers would sit in the Vice Principal's (VP) office which was smaller than this room but had air conditioning. Chairs were lined around the walls in the VP's office and teachers would constantly come in and out. The VP complained about how difficult it was to keep the room cold but was happy that she could provide a space of respite for her colleagues during temperatures that would cross 42 degrees Celsius on most days in the summer. Tea was always flowing in that office along with *samosas* and french fries from the local vendor inside the school. I would be handed a plate with a samosa and french fries every time I visited and offered tea. The hospitable environment in the VP's office was one of respite from the hustle and bustle of the city and of teaching, administrative and disciplinary tasks that lay beyond the doors of that office. The VP was always involved in administrative task with her huge register open in front of her while everyone around her would be engaged in idle chatter or silently drinking their

tea. Teachers would come in from a long day of teaching and collapse on one of the chairs. They would be offered tea and conversation.

The VP's office was not the only place where teachers came together. While her office was right in front of the main entrance, I want to bring into focus a staff room that was situated in one of the buildings at the back – a safe distance from the front entrance.



Figure 7: Corridors at Dharampura College

This staff room was on the first floor, situated in a corner where it was impossible to find unless you knew someone. I went there looking for a teacher who was not available but was invited to sit and wait for her. This staffroom was half the size of the VP's office. The other two teachers who invited me to wait with them were half-lying, half-sitting on the sofa. The staff

room could seat four and had tall, metal cabinets lined on one side, with the name of a subject on each drawer of the cabinet. The teachers were talking about how this was the only staff room with a working fan (there was no electricity, and the fan was connected to a backup battery sitting on top of the metal cabinet). Both the teachers had chiffon *dupattas* draped over their heads and were wearing *shalwar kameez*.

The clock in the room was broken and the semblance of productive time or “clock time”¹⁰ (Adams, 2006) seemed to fade away. One of the teachers had a thick book placed in front of her that said English in bold red letters. She was waiting for her next class. She tried to get a day off but was not allowed to do so. The two women were in conversation about their daily lives. The English teacher was sharing her experience with being a new mother: "I was feeding my son yesterday and he liked one side better than the other. So, one of my breasts is larger and the other one small." She explains as they both burst into laughter.

The staff room allowed them to share intimate details about their personal lives while also having a laugh at the same time. The two teachers in the staffroom were both married women with lower middle-class sensibilities of dressing modestly, being dutiful wives, mothers, and daughters, with a teaching job which is considered respectable – in that, it does not take up most of your day as a traditional office job does. Despite fitting into these roles comfortably, they opted for teaching positions because it allows them to get out of their homes for a few hours and make friendships. (Phadke et al. 2011) look at loitering in India and how women’s mobility outside the home is extremely limited. They need a reason to get out of the house and going to work is one of them. The teachers were quite intrigued when they found out that I was doing my

¹⁰ Time-keeping is now standard, quantifiable, and universal. In the modern, post-industrial society institutions and humans are required to adapt this time. Similarly, a neoliberal university or college is structured around the clock-time.

Masters in Egypt. They asked me if I was able to travel for studying without having to pay for it and I told them that I went on a fully funded scholarship.

"My nephew did his medical degree from China but he still had to give so many tests, and re-do his practical training from Bahawalpur¹¹ without getting paid. What's the point of going abroad if you have to struggle so much when you come back? No one recognizes your efforts so why waste them? It's better to stick to whatever is available in Pakistan and is convenient. For instance, I got admitted to an international relations degree at Punjab University¹² on a full scholarship. I was the first woman in my family to do so. However, my uncle, who is a professor, told me that it was useless and that I shouldn't opt for it. If you want to become a teacher then you want to do basic subjects like Physics, English, etc."

The understanding that the ceiling of a woman's professional career is teaching is implicit here. The teacher went on to tell me how people who go on to work in foreign relations and government service do those kinds of degrees (referring to international relations) and how that kind of degree would be wasted on her. Education being useful or wasteful was a continuous theme during my time spent at the colleges. Women who worked in these colleges, primarily as teachers but also as lab assistants and administrative staff, focused on emphasizing the use-value of their degrees when asked for their reasoning to choose their job.

Most of the teachers that I talked to had similar stories. They were offered scholarships to study in a different city or even in the same city but a co-ed university and many of them were not allowed to due to some male figure in the family contesting that decision. To that end, the staff room is also a place where women come together to discuss important and mundane life events. It is a place where they can step outside the roles of being a mother, wife, daughter, and teacher. The frivolity of conversations, the *mazaa* of teasing and joking with each other urges us

¹¹ A city in Punjab, south of Lahore.

¹² Oldest public university in the province of Punjab, founded during the British colonial rule over the subcontinent. Located in Lahore, Punjab University has competitive admissions criteria and a high prestige level associated with its degree. It attracts students from all over the province of Punjab and the rest of the country. It is coeducational in nature.

to think deeply about the political and cultural implications of fun but at the same time understand that sometimes there are no implications (Anjaria and Anjaria 2020). Fun for the sake of fun without looking for ways in which these lower-middle-class teachers on not-so-generous government salaries are living subjugated lives allows for new ways of seeing and being with people.

A third teacher walks in. She is younger than the other two and is not wearing a dupatta on her head. The other two look at her and say:

"She's here for the winds of Hunza¹³," referring to the fan.

The new young woman laughs and sits down.

"Have you started shopping for your wedding? When is it again?" one of the older colleagues asks.

"No, not really. My father still must pay my brother's college tuition and I'm still paying off my student debt. My wedding is in February so there is still plenty of time."

"Who arranged your marriage by the way? Is it your cousin that you are getting married to?"

"No, no, it's out of the family. I have an uncle who arranged it so I'm not quite sure about the man."

"You don't need to be sure about the guy. Let me tell you golden words to live by: during the first five years of marriage, you need to put a lock on your mouth, and you will live a happy life. After that things settle down."

The older two laugh while their younger colleague shifts uncomfortably on the sofa and changes the topic of conversation by pointing out how her colleague sitting next to her had some sort of skin allergy on her arms.

Her colleague responded: "yes, this is nothing new. It's been there for a while now."

¹³ Valley situated in the northern part of Pakistan in the territory of Gilgit-Baltistan.

"Well, then you should get it checked by a doctor."

"I am not going to a doctor and wasting my money."

"Maybe you should try putting yourself first because no one else is going to do that."

The staff room is a place where older women can joke, tease each other, offer advice, and talk about the ups and downs of their lives. This kind of camaraderie and fun is something that women achieve outside the house (Kirmani 2020). Friendship or *dosti* (friendship) is a concept that is elusive in the subcontinent. It is a notion that is structured around male sociality and involvement in work outside the home like teaching provides adult women with the possibility of making friends outside of their kin network and across different ages (Roy 2022). The younger teacher advising her older colleague to get her rash checked up instead of dismissing it is an act of care and companionship that women can provide within the space of the staff room. Similarly, the older teacher in giving marital advice to her younger colleague comes from a place of personal experience of navigating the unequal hierarchies of marriage in lower-middle-class households. While the lives of these women revolve around their families, they come together for a few hours each week to talk, listen to each other, and foster a community of care and friendship – something that their kin relations cannot provide.

Thinking through Play and Time-Pass: Nisha, Zainab, and Laiba's Friendship:

Nisha's father is a *mazdoor* (laborer) and her mother stays at home to look after the family. Nisha's mother wakes her up at 5 am. She prays *Fajr*¹⁴ and then makes her father and two brothers' breakfast. One of her brother's is married and the other one is engaged. She has a younger sister who occasionally helps her with household chores but mostly she is on her own.

¹⁴ First out of five mandatory prayers in the Islamic faith that supposed to be prayed before sunrise.

She also has an older sister who is a year older than her but because she is getting married soon, she tries to do as little work as possible, and Nisha is happy to let her have this time off before she got married and has to labor all day for her in-laws. Her mother makes lunch because she is at college but when she goes back home, she must clean up and then look after the evening tea and often time dinner preparations. At age 17, she is not allowed to own a smartphone, but she uses her mother's.

Zainab and Nisha have grown up together. They went to the same school and live two streets away from each other. Their mothers are very good friends too. They both visit each other's homes (with their mothers) quite regularly. Zainab speaks Seraiki¹⁵ and Nisha tells me that she is a Pathaan¹⁶. Zainab slaps Nisha jokingly and says: "Have you ever seen a Pathaan like this?" referring to Nisha's dusky complexion. Pathaans or Pashtuns hailing from the North are known for their fair skin and (at times) colored eyes. Nisha laughs and informs us that her mother's side of the family is from Faisalabad¹⁷ telling us of her mixed heritage. Nisha and Zainab were both studying physical education. It was the only subject that was easy and available as they enrolled later in the admission cycle.

"We used to exercise last year when we first started this program but then they stopped. I think the teacher left. We rarely have teachers come to class; they usually send our seniors to substitute. They just read from the textbook while the rest of the class chats. Physical education students are an afterthought. We usually sit on the floor under a shed for our classes because there are no empty classrooms to fit our schedules. Science students are given priority. They also have the highest enrollment. We're just here to pass and get our diploma which is fine. We still enjoy coming to college. We take a day off whenever we want to because we know we won't be missing much. Nisha and I usually schedule our days off. It's terrible when one of us comes and the other one is absent. The day seems longer," Zainab explains.

¹⁵ Saraiki is spoken in the southwestern half of the province of Punjab along with its bordering province of Sindh in Pakistan.

¹⁶ ethnicity of the northwest province of Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa

¹⁷ A city in Punjab.

When I asked Nisha and Zainab what they do when they're not in class or in class and nothing interesting is happening to which both replied: *time pass*. Doing *time pass* (in English) the passing of time until something tangible comes along (Jeffrey 2010). While Jeffrey refers to time pass in the context of men in government colleges who have access to public spaces and the ability to loiter without being monitored, I shift this lens of *time pass* to young women in government colleges who are restricted to spaces of the home and college. When I pushed them to explain what *time pass* meant, they looked at each other rather confused and said that it meant nothing. In hindsight, I should not have expected them to have an answer to my question in the first place as "Fun is not organized. it is spontaneous, outside the routine, unpredictable, and risky" (Bayat 2007).

Zainab started writing on Nisha's white uniform which already had some random drawings and names of some of her friends. "You ask such weird questions, but it's fun talking to you," she said deep in thought as she scribbled her name on Nisha's shirt. As we were sitting in an empty classroom amongst a few other young women who were also just sitting there and chatting, a proctor comes in and asks us to leave. A lecture was about to start, and they needed the classroom.



Figure 8: Corridors of Dharampura College where chairs and pedestal fans are dragged in the corridor for young women to sit and chat.

“Every day we have to find a new spot to sit because this college is overpopulated,” Nisha said as they took me outside to find a new spot.

We made our way to the back of the college where an abandoned basketball court was adjacent to a large green playing field, all of which was populated by young women sitting under the shades of old trees, chatting, and laughing in the scorching 12 P.M. heat of August. Two young women were fighting, shouting, and laughing simultaneously behind us and when I asked Nisha and Zainab what that was about, they said it was probably about a boy and that it was nothing serious. They told me that most young women in the college were engaged to be married and very few were married. Nisha told me that even Zainab was engaged to her mother's aunt's son in Karachi for a few months. Zainab used to chat with him on WhatsApp.

"I used to chat with him. I stopped talking to him because my father had told me that he was breaking the engagement off. Despite that, he would call, and make declarations of love and commitment. He would say: I'll talk to my mother; she'll find a way for us to stay engaged. but I wasn't interested so I blocked him. I'm the eldest in my family, my father is always worried about his health and not being alive to marry the rest of my four siblings, so he wants me to be close by you know." Zainab explained.

"Most of the young women in our class are engaged. Almost everybody. Those who aren't will one day get a surprise from their family telling them that they've found a suitable man and that she'll be married off soon. No engagement for these young women, it's straight to marriage." Nisha explained

"That's what'll happen to her." Zainab teased Nisha who laughed and shook her head denying her statement while pushing her friend away in a playful manner.

"Why do you say that?" I asked Zainab

"Her mother caught her (Nisha's) sister talking to one of her cousins on the phone during her brother's wedding so she called the local cleric, had him bring the *nikah*¹⁸ papers, and made their sister and the boy that she was talking to sign these papers. They are officially getting married in a month and I'm telling her that her mother is going to pull the same trick and I am so excited. I've even planned for the days that I will be taking off from college." explained Zainab with excitement.

"Most of us marry within the family. That's what you have to do when you have huge families. It's simpler that way. As soon as the young women turn north of fourteen or fifteen years of age the *rishtedaars* (relatives) start booking them for their sons. So, there is that urgency to get engaged. Engagement in our families last 4-5 years on average. Everyone dreams of getting engaged. There's a party, and good food, you get to dress up and be the center of attention. Plus, the gifts that come after the engagements in the form of money, clothes, or both if you're lucky are themselves valid reasons to want to be engaged. We don't get any gifts from our parents or our families, not even on Eid." Nisha explained.

At this point, Zainab and Nisha's third friend Laiba had joined. After listening to the conversation, she added:

¹⁸ Nikah is a religious marriage ceremony where a nikahnama (Islamic marriage contract) is signed by both the bride and groom in the presence of three (male) witnesses and a cleric. In Pakistan nikah is the religious part of the marriage followed by *ruksati* (farewell). It is a cultural ceremony where the bride leaves her parent's home to go to (continued from the previous footnote): her in-laws. Most young women who have had their nikah still live with their parents until a mutually decided time for the ruksati ceremony is agreed upon.

"I have an elder brother who is married to my cousin and we would take Eid gifts for her twice a year. She loved it but now that they are married, we've stopped. We can't keep giving her gifts. That is why the engagement period is the best. No one wants to get married outside of the festivities but what can we do, it is the natural way of life"

The claims of small pleasures or consumerist desires cannot be read as neo-liberal subjectivities or capitalism captivity alone (Roy 2022). Lower-class women who reside on the periphery of consumer culture cannot be captured through the capitalist exchange (Khalili 2016). Rather than seeing them as victims of consumer culture, one needs to focus on how these attachments end up being cruelly optimistic (Berlant 2011). These young women hardly short of eighteen are aware of the cruel optimism posed by the grandeur façade of having a wedding and the material benefits of it but they also know that this may be the only time they are able to receive this kind of time and attention. Laiba, Nisha, and Zainab were all inciteful and thrifty young women who were responsible enough to manage their own money (whatever little they had) while navigating their daily lives with the limited resources that they had. One particular day as we were all heading out after a long day of fieldwork, the three young women took their burqas out of their bags and started to put them on:

"Can I have my committee next week?" Laraib asked her friends. "I want to buy a new burqa"

"Nisha wants to buy a ring for her *woh* (them: referring to her to-be fiance)." Zainab came in defense of her friend who was hoping to take out the committee next.

"You can't buy a gold ring for 3000 rupees. Are you dumb?" Laraib responded.

Nisha diffused the fight and told Laraib that she could have next week's committee.

A "committee" is referred to as communal money pooling and saving technique used by women to save their own money. Nisha explained how they pool 10rs reach every day and every 10 days or so someone takes the total sum after communally deciding who it will be and the pool

continues until the next 10 days when someone else's turn will come to take the money. That way, you get to decide how much money you will spend, and you don't have to ask your parents for money. Committees are commonly used by young women and women of all ages in Pakistan. It is an informal way of keeping money stashed away for personal consumptive desires and at times women even use committees to pay for their children's weddings or some other big event. Most women in Pakistan do not have access to bank accounts or money. This thrifty way of saving and loaning money is what allows for fun activities like eating together or ordering a new burqa or scarf or hair accessories.

A few days later, I am sitting with the three young women again. The young women ask whether the tree we are sitting under is a Tamarind tree. Long, Brown, pod-like fruits are hanging from the tree. Some have fallen. Zainab picks them from the ground and breaks one open. She asks Nisha to taste it. Nisha refuses. She takes some of the pulp and puts her finger in Nisha's mouth. Nisha spits it out as she laughs. They make me taste it too. I have no idea what it is and they all start laughing at me. Khalili (2016) perceptively writes how “conviviality had something utopian about it”. Spending countless hours at these colleges, with young women who laugh loudly, shout at each other, and physically push and tease each other are ways of becoming visible in a society where a woman’s body is always subject to discipline (Phadke 2011).

While playing with tamarind pods which they have now started throwing at each other, Zainab exclaims:

"Her sister's wedding is coming up. I'm just waiting for her to get married. Do you know her marriage has been arranged?"

"No! She's lying." Nisha screamed in her usual carefree manner.

"Didn't your uncle come to your house with clothes and gifts??" Zainab replied.

"Yes, but what does that have to do with my marriage being arranged?" Nisha asked innocently.

"That's the tradition when someone asks for your hand in marriage and that only happens when your parents accept. So please don't pretend like you don't know what's happening otherwise your uncle will hold a bullet to your head too" Zainab said facetiously.

"Wait what? I exclaimed

"Well, when my sister got caught talking to my cousin (her now husband) on the phone everyone came to the conclusion that the two should be married off. It was my brother's wedding reception since there was already a celebration, the two families decided to get them Islamically married off right there and then. My sister was so shocked that she refused. I mean anyone would. It was crazy. My uncle (sister's now father-in-law) is in the police so he took out his gun when my sister refused to sign the papers and held it to her head until she signed." Nisha explained casually.

"He's going to hold a gun to your head too if you don't start to take this seriously," Zainab said, this time with a little more gravity than her previous light-hearted quips.

Teasing and joking can be about nothing but at times, they serve a particular purpose. Zainab's constant reminders to Nisha through witticisms were a way of her preparing her friend for something that she may not be taking seriously – marriage. To that end, time pass has many layers to it, from frivolous acts of joy to joking about serious realities of life. Nisha, Zainab, and Laraib's friendship help us think through how these young women navigate their ostensibly mundane lives through play and light-hearted humor.

Chapter 3

Mobile Phones, Digital Lives and Morality in All-Young women Public Colleges in Lahore, Pakistan

Mobile phones are an important part of young people's lives in Pakistan and around the world. Their capacity to increase the sociality of young individuals which is otherwise restricted to their homes makes them an enticing object to engage with in this chapter. The majority of the literature on mobile phones in the global south looks at the frameworks of empowerment within the context of gender. There is little to no literature engaging on how the mobile phone alters the social framework for adolescent young women – changes the way in which they engage with the world around them.

This chapter broadly aims to look at what access to mobile phones means for young adolescent young women and women in public colleges in Lahore and their families. It simultaneously unpacks various ways in which the mobile phone as an object is possessed (owned or shared) and controlled by institutions of the family and education. What kind of sociality is constructed by the politics of mobile phone ownership or lack thereof, and what does it say about the larger Pakistani society? How do young women learn to subvert structures of control and challenge the social boundaries of virtual presence and mobile usage? This constant aspiration of having access to mobile and the internet and negotiation to be up to date with what is going on through sharing, or through friends tells a larger story of young women navigating risk and safety online that I hope to unravel in this chapter.

This chapter is divided into three sections. The first section draws on ethnographic material to situate the mobile phone within the Pakistani context – especially within the household and college. Secondly, I will look at the moral economy of mobile phones in public colleges. How the mobile is used to pursue romantic interests and relationships and what are the consequences of such pursuits? How is morality structured around mobile phone usage? Finally, in the third section, through conversations and time spent with the young women at public colleges, I will look at how these young women not only navigate digital landscapes but also how they manifest their own unique identities through social media platforms. Lastly, I would like to conclude by discussing the kind of modern dilemmas mobile and internet technologies face in Pakistan in the contemporary moment and what does it mean to look for a nuanced understanding of gender roles and family dynamics in Pakistan?

Mobile Phone as an Object of Inquiry

“Are you on Instagram? Can I please have your Instagram handle? Please, please. I want to see your pictures.” Sixteen-year-old Malaika insisted as she pulled on my sleeve.

“Do you have a cell phone?” I inquired

“I don’t have a personal phone, but we have a phone at home.” Malaika has five siblings. She shares a smartphone with two of her younger sisters and her mother. Her father and two older brothers have their own personal phones.

Forty-four percent of women own a mobile phone as opposed to 80% of men amongst the adult population in Pakistan according to GSMA’s gender gap report (2021). Phone ownership is not the only metric that is relevant here, as internet access is also an important point of entry into access to social media platforms like WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok. In addition

to this, the report stipulates that the gap between phone ownership and internet use is 40% in urban settings like Lahore. Pakistan has been identified as the most conservative country in South Asia in terms of mobile phone access. Most of the young women that I talked to in both colleges, had varied responses regarding mobile phone ownership that I would like to engage with to make sense of the complex social relationships that are at play with the ownership and use of the mobile phone. Model Town college, which is situated in a more socio-economically prosperous neighborhood had a larger number of young women who had access to personal smartphones and the internet at home. Older young women (18 to 20 years of age) would write down their cell phone numbers or ask me for mine in a casual exchange by opening a random page in a textbook and pushing a pencil my way. Mobile phones were strictly off-limits on college grounds, and anyone caught with a phone had to face (at times) severe consequences, depending on what grounds they got caught on. I will talk more about the moral regulation of the mobile phone economy in colleges in the second section of this chapter.

Meeral and Kiran asked for my number after our first short encounter and by the time I had gotten home, I had already received a message from them on WhatsApp. Texting on WhatsApp was more economical as the young women explained that messaging on the local network was expensive. Whereas the internet is a one-time payment that their parents have to make every month and they can send as many messages and browse as much as they want. In Model Town College particularly, the administration had its own YouTube channel under a cryptic name which was used to upload announcements and (online) lectures. There is no other way of reaching the entire college population, the young women tell me. The other alternative would be to text the parents with announcements, but the cost of that project is too much for a public college. Dharampura College, on the hand, is situated in a low-socioeconomic area where

most young women did not have their own smartphones or internet at home. Many of these young women shared a phone with the rest of their female family members like Malaika owing to economic circumstances not allowing people to own individual phones along with the general culture of sharing Ahmed et al. (2017). Ownership of mobile phones is also dependent on how many siblings one would have and this would hold true for both demographics of colleges. Young women who belonged to two to three-sibling households usually had their own phones as opposed to young women who had four to six siblings which accounted for a majority of the students. Similarly, young women who had older brothers or multiple brothers did not have their personal phones owing to patterns of surveillance exhibited by male kin (Ibtasam et al. 2019). “My father passed away two years ago and my mother isn’t well either. I have an older brother who recently got married. He has a smartphone, and he recently gifted his wife one too but he doesn’t allow me to have one.” Saira (Dharampura College, 17 years old)

The mobile phone as an object represents freedom (Bhallamudi 2022) but it is also seen as an “object of distrust” (Doron 2012). It enables women to be mobile in a way that they physically cannot by allowing them to evade traditional methods of control and explore romances, watch content that is otherwise forbidden and discover different ways of being that disrupt the South Asian socialization of an obedient and submissive daughter, wife, and mother (Abraham 2001). In the absence of her father, Saira’s brother has taken the role of the guardian and protector of his sister by monitoring her social and virtual whereabouts – he picks her up from college and drops her off too. Unlike her friends who walk to college, Saira is not allowed to do so. However, Saira goes on to explain how her sister-in-law also does not have free control of her mobile phone. Her brother oversees recharging his wife’s phone with credit which allows him to monitor the extent of the use of his wife’s phone. The transitional relationship between

the mobile phone and young women before and after they get married is worth noticing. _

Muneeba, a twenty-year-old senior in college, was called into the staffroom where I was sitting. One of the Urdu teachers sitting there asked her why she was absent for the past two weeks but more importantly, when the teacher tried to contact her on her personal phone, a man picked up the phone. “Ma’am, I had my *nikah* and that was my cousin... I mean husband.” Muneeba responded as she looked at the floor avoiding eye contact.

The teacher was still not satisfied with the answer and asked her why she had her phone. They were only legally married right now, it's not like she was living with him – implying that giving up one’s phone after marriage was not a rare occurrence. Doron (2012) talks about the varying levels of subordinate positions women must undergo at a young age from being a daughter, and a sister to a daughter-in-law and wife, and how these roles demand different kinds of monitoring. Older women at the college, teachers, and administrators all had mobile phones, particularly smartphones because as Doron explains older women or women with children are not considered a threat to the family. In fact, in the absence of brothers and fathers, it is the mother-in-law and mother who are in charge of the phone within the household.

Muneeba’s marriage and entry into a new family mean that her social network, contained and represented by the mobile phone, must be dismantled (ibid). Her connections with her college, teachers, friends, and family would be all mediated by her husband who is the first point of contact when someone calls on the number that was previously Muneeba’s.

While Saira’s story was not uncommon in Dharampura, socioeconomic status has a role to play in deciding who gets to keep a phone and who does not. “My father is a businessman and my mother is the principal of (a private, home-based tutoring service) the academy we run so they trust me and are very open-minded” Aliya explained when I asked her if she owned a mobile

phone. However, when I asked her for her number she paused halfway through the digits and said that she didn't remember and asked for my number instead.

Aliya, Kiran, and Meeral from Model Town College all belonged to a two-sibling household and had more economic opportunities to negotiate cell phone ownership and usage with their parents than their counterparts at Dharampura. Meeral's father owned his own automobile repair shop, Aliya's father sold dyes used to color cloth, and Kiran's father was a sports teacher in a private school in Lahore. All of them had display pictures on their WhatsApp profiles which were cryptic like their names. Aliya's name on WhatsApp was Aymee, and Meeral was Meeru – I was told that it was a common practice to change your name online. The young women explained how coming up with variously configured names for themselves to reimagine themselves. It was also a way to evade nosy relatives who are always trying to find out if you have an online profile or a WhatsApp, Aliya tells me. The politics of online presence is strategic and not restricted to the changing of names. Meeral's display picture was a snap of herself in front of the mirror with an (old) iPhone that covered her face. Similarly, Kiran had a picture of herself where her face was half-covered with her hair, and one could just see her eyes. Most young women were not allowed to put pictures of themselves on social media platforms and those who did like Meeral and Kiran, did so with obscure images of themselves that did not reveal their faces. Putting a picture of yourself online is not considered safe. Nisha, from Dharampura College, narrated an incident of how once her father, whom she is very close to, uploaded a display picture of the two of them. Shortly after the picture was uploaded, her relatives started commenting on how very forward or *maadern* it was of him. One of Nisha's uncles (her mother's brother) called her father and said: "I don't know where you're from but we

don't put pictures of our women online for the world to see.”

Nisha's father was a laborer who relied heavily on ties of kinship for financial and familial support. Her uncle who told her father off for uploading a picture of his daughter was a police officer in Faisalabad and was economically well-off compared to Nisha's family. He was also interested in getting Nisha married to one of his sons who was two years younger than her and was in tenth grade. This dependency on networks of kin demonstrated how the use and ownership of mobile phones and having a digital presence were dictated not only by immediate members of the family but also by extended relations.

Nisha herself did not own a mobile phone but used her mother's phone. While initially, she refused to acknowledge that she was on social media, later when we established trust, she revealed that she would chat with her (male) cousin late at night and delete the chats before her mother woke up the next morning. It was a common practice for young women to deny owning a cell phone to strangers (like myself) or people outside their immediate family circles as young women owning phones was not considered appropriate (Ibtasam et al. 2019). Quite a few of the young women that I talked to in Dharampura College revealed that they talked to their (male) cousins on their mobiles because the risk of talking to an unknown man was not worth it.

The daily lives of these young women were strictly monitored. They were not allowed to go to a friend's house unsupervised, as Nisha and Zainab explained, or leave the premises of their homes unless it was to go to college or a relative's house. The mobile phone allowed for access to virtual spaces where presence in physical spaces for limited and monitored. A lot of the young women that I talked to were huge fans of Korean pop culture and would have display pictures of Korean stars. Online presence for adolescent young women also meant making fan pages for

Bollywood, Korean, and Hollywood stars. Quite a few of the young women that I talked to had Facebook or (increasingly) Instagram profiles with fake names and images of famous people. They used these profiles to follow influencers, their classmates, famous actors, and fan pages of their favorite TV serials. This kind of usage was allowed by family members as long as it was within limits (of Pakistani morality) (Velaskar 2016).

Morality as a Digital and Social Currency

"We live in a world of smartphones, laptops, and the internet. *Ghareello* (Housewives) and uneducated women are easy to trick. They are so absorbed in household tasks that they don't have time to monitor their children. Most of my students live in joint family systems, with their uncles, aunts, and grandparents, which leaves the task of parenting on the back burner. There is too much going on for the parents to focus on their children. While mobile phones are restricted on college premises, that is not enough. We need to teach young women how to use mobile phones in a responsible way – within the limits that Islam and our culture have prescribed us. Eventually, they are going to be mothers and will be responsible for molding an entire generation in the world of technology. Therefore, the onus is on us to make sure that we provide a strong moral education to these young women. " Miss Sana¹⁹ (Physics teacher, Dharampura College, Lahore).

Miss Sana strongly emphasized the element of moral education which public college education is structured around. For a bit of context regarding moral education and how it ties into the social and teaching aspect of education, I would like to analyze the compulsory subjects taught at the BA level – the final two years of college. This curriculum has two compulsory subjects: Pakistan Studies and Islamic Studies. For non-Muslim students, there is an option called: Ethics. The Ethics syllabus is designed in the shadow of the Islamic Studies course. It starts with looking at what the “moral standard” is for law, happiness, and perfection. Linking them to family values which are the glue of society. Following this is a survey of the ethical teachings of Hinduism, Christianity, Buddhism, Judaism, and Islam. The curriculum implies that

¹⁹ Teachers were referred to by the students and junior (in age and rank) faculty and staff members by the following terms: Miss (unmarried), Mrs. (married), Ma'am. These terms were used interchangeably by the students who were unaware of the marital status of the teachers and deliberately by the teachers and staff.

all religions apart from Islam are devoid of essence. The essence of inclusivity and morality surpasses all other religions. There is a compulsory section on 100 ethical precepts of the Quran and Hadith and the syllabus is concluded with a section titled: “Islam’s attitude towards minorities”. In “Regulating Aversion: Tolerance in The Age of Identity and Empire” (2009) Wendy Brown understands tolerance as a category that caters to the marginalized while conserving the hegemonic order of society. Similarly, the ethics course comes under the guise of tolerance but is nothing more than a control mechanism designed to manage the other. Non-Muslim students are constructed in opposition to the ideal Muslim citizen subject. It does not matter what kind of a non-Muslim one is; they are otherized in spaces of education that reflect the state itself.

More weightage is given to the Islamic Studies part of the syllabus which notes the Quran as the number one text that students will be referring to in the class with a range of passages in Arabic cited in the text that has to do with morality ethics and law. The narrative of Islam in this syllabus is particularly Sunni and this can be seen with multiple references and sections dedicated to the Caliphs that came after the Prophet Muhammad minus Ali who is associated with Shia Muslims (minority). This general survey of the Islamic way of life and important people is followed by the role of women in society: having to do with purdah or veil and the domestic space within which the woman’s place is.

Similarly, the Pakistan Studies curriculum, which is also in Urdu, focuses heavily on constructing the historical foundations of the country that serve as building blocks of Pakistani identity. Much like the Islamic Studies and Ethics curriculum, Pakistan Studies focuses heavily on reinforcing the nationalist ideology in tandem with Islam. I survey the curriculums of compulsory subjects to ground Miss Sana’s emphasis on moral education which is rooted in what

is taught in the classroom. Based on this social moral framework, the use of the mobile phone in a women's college is heavily surveilled.

The presence of a mobile phone in the hands of a student on (any) college premise in Lahore is akin to a crime. From catching the offender to setting up a trial in the (vice) principal's office. I was present at one of these hearings at 10:45 in the morning. The Vice Principal's office was busier than usual and there was a line of young women accompanied by their mothers or elder sisters (female kin) standing outside. I made my way inside and Rabia, the teaching intern, moved her bag from the only seat that was empty next to her and gestured for me to sit down. Three senior teachers sat next to me and they were all engrossed in deciding the extent of a reasonable "punishment" that would be suitable to discipline the young women standing outside the office. It was a Friday, which is a half-day owing to Jumma prayers in the afternoon. The college closes at 12 pm instead of the regular 1:30 pm. The teachers sitting inside the office were on monitoring duty earlier in the day – roaming the halls and open spaces (courtyards, grounds, alleyways) of the college to catch students who had snuck their mobile phones into college. The Vice Principal was glued to her register, as usual, rarely looking up but fully aware of the ongoing situation as her remarks and counsel every now and then suggested. She was cross-checking teacher duties and enrollment with another teacher. The vigilance team (of teachers) was discussing a particular case concerning a student who was invited in for her questioning. A group of young women was caught for a variety of misdemeanors all of which had to do with the mobile phone. A young woman in a uniform was found hanging out with two young women who had changed out of their uniforms and into their burqas. The teachers were trying to unpack why the young women had changed into their burqas and why they had brought their mobile phones with them.

"This is the same young woman we caught hanging out with this young woman in the morning."
Miss Sana said pointing her finger at the young woman in the uniform.

"Isn't she the young woman who always has asthma issues whenever we catch her not attending her classes?" Rabia said casually as she examined the shape of her nails.

"Yes, yes she is the same young woman! She either has asthma issues or she starts to cry every time we confront her. Look at the tears already gathering in her eyes," an older teacher, Shumaila remarks as she points toward this young woman "her performance is already started, she looks up at the ceiling unamused.

"No, Miss I have rarely come to this office. Maybe sometime last year but not on a regular basis and do you know that asthma is a serious issue? How can you mock me like this? I don't pretend to have asthma. I really do have it." The young woman in the uniform defends herself in a loud and cracked voice.

"Who said asthma is not a real disease? I'm sure you have it." Rabia replied instantly with a slight smile forming at the corner of her mouth.

During this rather intense and accusatory back and forth, the vice principal looked up from her register, took her glasses off, and looked at me:

"We do not allow cell phones in schools. This is a permanent mandate in all government colleges. I don't know how they do it over there in private colleges, but we will not have these devices on our premises."

She then interjected the other conversation and told the young women in a polite tone to not speak so loudly after which she resumed looking down at her register. Sana, Rabia, and Shumaila started discussing amongst each other whether they should call the young women's

mother or let her off with a warning. The young women, who was still in the room started to beg her teachers to not call her mother:

"I don't have a father, please don't call my mother."

The teachers continued their line of reasoning and kept questioning her why she was around the young women who were causing trouble and breaking the rules.

"I just wanted to get a pen, Miss." The young women defended herself

"Out of all the young women in the college, you wanted to get a pen from the young women standing outside the principal's office?" exclaimed Ms. Sana as she turned to the rest of the teachers and said: "All of these young women are in a *gang* I tell you. We need to break it up. They're causing enough trouble as is."

The teachers all looked at each other and consulted one another on whether they should fine²⁰ her? As soon as the young women under question heard that she started to plead loudly, again: No ma'am please I do not have a father, what will I do? Where will I get the money for the fine?"

The vice principal took a deep sigh as she was forced to look up from her register, again. She asked the young women, again, to lower her voice and then looked at her teachers. That brief glimpse was enough of an understanding between the two parties suggesting that a decision had been reached. The Vice Principal (VP) dismissed the young women with a warning and advised her to have warm water as a remedy for her "tuneless, high-pitched voice" which was quite bothersome for her. As soon as the young women left the VP asked the teachers about how much money they had collected from fining students?

"180 Rupees only" replied Miss Sana

She nodded her head and asked the teachers if they were hungry. She had finished eating

²⁰ Fine is a term used for penalizing students for a misconduct with a certain amount of money.

the boiled egg and now wanted her regular samosa and fries that she ate every day around 11 AM. The canteen boy was called upon and orders for samosas and fries were given before the other two young women were called in. One young woman was dressed in a black abaya with black diamontes on her bell sleeves, she draped a blue printed scarf on her head. She was accompanied by a friend, who was wearing her regular white uniform with a dupatta on her head.

"Why are you not wearing your uniform?" questioned Miss Sana "Where is it?"

The young women had no reply, and the teachers continued their line of questioning one after the other:

"Is this what you come here to do?"

"You are about to graduate, and you seem unaware of the policy that phones are not allowed in college. Why did you bring your phone?"

"Give us your phone's password, I want to see what you're up to. When I caught you with your phone, you and your friends seemed quite troubled. We need to know what's so troubling that you're breaking all the rules to solve it"

Miss Sana scrolled through her student's phone and nodded her head as if her suspicions came out to be true: "So it is boy. Who is he?"

"My cousin", the young women replied.

Please say yes, a message was read out loud to the room for all the teachers to hear.

"What is he asking you to say yes to?"

"For marriage" the young women replied

"Why don't you say yes then??" the teacher asked

The young women did not respond.

"Both of you think you are so mature. Why does he have to ask you for your hand in marriage? Are your parents dead? How can he marry you without talking to your parents first? But no, you wanted an *affair*, right?"

While the term *affair* is reserved for married people involved in infidelity, in the local context *affair* is reserved for two consenting adults who are romantically involved outside the institution of marriage. The use of the term *affair* and the negative connotation associated with it is important because women are seen as a potential scandal. Regular surveillance to check if young young women bring phones to college is put in place owing to the understanding that a young young women with a mobile phone must be talking to a man. In Pakistani society, talking to the opposite gender or engaging with them in any form, is against all social norms. Various hierarchies of discipline are put in place at the college and at home to avoid any potential scandals that come from talking to boys or having *affairs*.

The Vice Principal asked for the young women's mother to be called in. The mother looked confused and distraught. During my conversations with Miss. Sana two days ago, she talked about how a lot of women who send their young women here are so engrossed in housework that they do not have time to talk to teachers about their daughter's misdemeanors or progress in school/college. Miss Sana's description matched that of the mother who was called in because her daughter was caught with a mobile phone. She had deep dark circles under her eyes and her face had a permanent expression of exhaustion and discomfort at having to be standing in the vice principal's office.

"Your daughter is being fined for bringing a cell phone to school. Please pay up." The Vice Principal said, momentarily looking up from her register before going back to it.

"I don't know what's happening. I just came running because you called me, I don't have any money on me right now." The mother replied.

"We know about your financial condition. We usually charge 3000 rupees for this offense but we are only charging 200 rupees so, please ask someone to bring the money."

The mother was not pleased to hear this, but she made a call from a small phone she had tucked under her black *dupatta* which she had draped around her head and body.

The Vice Principal looked up from her register and said:

"You look like you're going to beat her up very much when you go back home. I would strongly urge against that. I sense that you are going to curse at her, taunt her, and physically hit her. Please try to control yourself otherwise she is going to run away with that boy she is secretly talking to. So be patient and talk to her with love and make her understand why what she is doing is wrong."

The Vice Principal was referring to the unruly appearance of the mother who had no patience to be standing in an office to be lectured about her parenting. The kind of discipline done in college was very different from what the young student would receive at home in the form of verbal or physical abuse. As guessed by the VP, the mother looked away and did not respond to the advice that was being given to her. What this exchange revealed was that the teachers and staff were firstly performing controlling behaviors which were more important than the punishment itself, which is why they kept reducing the fine and let the young women and her mother go away with a warning. Secondly, they were trying to incorporate middle-class sensibilities in mothers who, through their appearance and the way that they were responding to the situation, seemed to belong to lower-class families. "Please take her phone away and make sure that she doesn't hang out with this *gang* of hers. You need to break this gang up for her own good. These young women are not a good influence on each other. Friends should keep each other on the right path," Miss Sana added.

While the teachers roamed the halls, looking for young women exhibiting overt signs of mobile usage, young women still got around to escape their vigilance. Moral policing is a part of the social fabric of Pakistan and upon multiple instances of spending time with college students, I noticed that friends would police their friend's behaviors. This opened up a deeper understanding of how the mobile phone determined who is good or bad. The exchange below will expand upon the role of friends in policing behaviors.

During a hot summer afternoon as I was chatting with Laiba, Zainab and Nisha, a fourth young woman showed up and Laiba screamed:

"I hate this young woman, these two (pointing at Zainab and Nisha) have no loyalty. This young woman is a *burri larki* (bad young women). I keep warning these young women to stay away from her but they don't listen."

Zainab and Nisha looked at each other and giggled.

"We are not going to treat someone badly. She has always been nice to us so why should we be mean to her?" Nisha jumped to defend herself.

"Why is she a *burri larki*?" I asked Laiba.

"She instigates fights. Spreads gossip but that's not all. She has her own phone and she's up all night calling and texting. This could get us in a lot of trouble. Our parents would think that we were talking to a boy. Plus, she talks to random men on her phone. Talking to your cousin is one thing but talking to random men is. *Astaghfirullah* (Arabic: I seek forgiveness from Allah). I have warned these young women so many times. They promise me that they are not going to talk to her or have any contact with her but then I see them hanging out with her."

"You guys are *kaafir* (non-Muslim)" Laiba exclaimed as she walked away. She then stopped talking to Zainab and Nisha despite their best efforts to maintain peace until they told Laraib to

walk away.

While teachers and friends constantly kept students in check, it was also the infrastructure of the college that was designed to keep students morally pure. In Model Town College, one of the students: Amna told me how the college did not have a cafeteria. Young women had to bring food from home or borrow from each other. It didn't matter if students were starving, they were not allowed to even buy snacks from roadside vendors situated right outside the gates of the college. Some young women try and bribe the security person to buy it for them but he doesn't budge. "We call him blackberry because he's old like the (blackberry brand) phone and he's always red and blue with anger," Amna explains. Currently, the small cafeteria hut was closed. The students used that space to hang out, gossip, and/or have lunch. "The previous vendors were three young, good-looking brothers who were very charming" Amna recalled how young women would flirt with them and exchange numbers. They were let go about a year ago because they were caught having an *affair* with one of the young women by one of the staff members. Ever since then, the administration has been cautious about whom to give business to. Most of the vendors are young men and that is an issue. My visit to the Dharampura canteen reinforced this notion as the vendors were a family of three. The husband and wife were older in age with a younger daughter who was covered in a burqa.

These two-year BA colleges were a last resort for most of the young women that I talked to. Either their parents could not afford to send them to their college of choice, or they missed admissions deadlines. Moreover, the young women who attended these colleges did so because their parents were afraid of sending them to four-year universities where coeducation could lead to potential moral ruin for their daughters. These colleges bear the tag of respectability in Pakistani society where parents and families of students are ensured that their daughters are

protected from the moral dangers of society – particularly the mobile phone and the internet. Most of the students talked about how they wanted to get out of here and join universities where they would have the freedom of movement, go to concerts, have food outside the university, dress up and wear makeup – all the desires that were squashed here. Despite structures of social and infrastructural control that this section looks at, these young women live in a digital age with access to technology and the internet. In the last section of this chapter, I look at how lives have become digital in the contemporary moment. How can everydayness unfold various relationalities to different digital landscapes? And how can these various interactions on and with the internet and the mobile phone lead to different kinds of possibilities?

Digital Lives and Mobile Landscapes: Stories from the Everyday

We were seated in a circle of twelve young women and while most of her peers would shy away from participating or focus on saying the right things, Ayesha talked about her life with confidence and ease. She talked about how she liked to go to the gym and how it was an integral part of her routine while all the young women around her looked at each other as if she was talking about something that was alien to them.

Ayesha wore a tightly wrapped baby pink scarf around her head and a red sash. She had a small mustache over her lips which seemed like an aftershave growth and she had a deep-set voice. Ayesha describes herself as a hacker.

"I really like science-fiction type movies that Hollywood makes. They are so informative. That's where I got the idea of hacking. The concept of spying on someone's private affairs is pretty impressive. I saw that all the cool people in movies were doing it so I started to learn about it on YouTube. It's not only that. I have seen my father slave away day and night to bring food to the table. Up until corona, I didn't even know who my father was because he was traveling all the time. He is a businessman. His business involves making shoe designs and getting them approved for big-brand (local) shoe stores like Bata and

Service. If he's not traveling, he comes home late when we are asleep. That really had a deep impact on me. Hacking allows me to work smart and earn double the amount of money my father earns in less than half the time and effort.”

“I used to do it illegally first, but I stopped because once I was reported to the authorities and the police came over. However, it was only my cousin whom I hacked so I apologized to him, and the issue was settled.”

"Why did you hack your cousin?" I asked

"Well, I hacked his WhatsApp conversations because he had recently gotten engaged, and I was curious about the kind of conversations he was having with his fiancé. I didn't know the matter would get out of hand so fast."

When I asked her if she found anything interesting in the chats that she hacked, she shook her head. Ayesha was curious about adult relationships and wanted to know what a man and a woman talked about before they got married but was disappointed with the conversation she hacked. It was boring and did not interest her at all. Another young woman Amber chimed in: "She also helps our teachers with technical problems. Once our teacher forgot her password and Ayesha sorted the matter for her."

"Does your family understand what you're doing?" I asked Ayesha.

"My mother doesn't understand me. We don't get along. It's because she's from the village and she doesn't understand where the world is headed. She always questions what I'm doing. Asks me why I can't live a normal life. But my father, he gets me. When the police came, he realized that there was no stopping me so he connected me with my cousin who has this hacking business so I can do it legally. After I am done with my FSc (10-12 high school grade equivalent), I am going to join his business. Maybe do a short course. A bachelor's degree is a waste of time. I just want to make money."

What Ayesha refers to as hacking are coding skills that she learned online because her

present education was not challenging enough and did not allow her to imagine a life where she can sustain herself outside the institution of marriage. Most of the young women in college are not prepared for future careers apart from medicine or teaching. That is not the job of these colleges. However, digital platforms allow these young women to imagine different futures and multiple ways of being. Social media platforms like WhatsApp, Facebook, Snapchat, Instagram, and TikTok, amongst others, allow young women to explore a world beyond what they are exposed to. They also create new ways of communication and expression. For instance, Shahista from Model Town College uses Snapchat: a social media application where you can send a photo or a snap that disappears after a few seconds of the receiver opening it. If one replays or screenshots the snap, the sender gets a notification that you have done so. Snapchat is widely used by women in Pakistan, particularly in these colleges because it gives them control over who gets to see what and for how long. Shahista sent me a snap every day for a few months. Sometimes, it is a dark picture with a timestamp of 12 am or 7 am. On other days, she sends dressed-up selfies of herself using beauty filters. This platform allows her to wear makeup, dress up and have a public presence amongst close friends. Something that the college, workspace, and physical public spaces do not allow.

Moreover, Shahista's snaps revealed puzzle pieces of her life that I had to put together to make sense of. Getting up at seven in the morning, her father, who is a sports teacher at a private young women' school in Lahore, is already dressed to drop her off at college before he goes off to work. Sports teachers are considered peripheral staff within the private school economy. Their pay ranges from 35,000 to 40,000 rupees depending on their level of experience. They are expected to pick up miscellaneous tasks that are not necessarily a part of their job description – like event management. In a largely female staff, most sports teachers who are men are also

Christian. The private school economy is very different from public education. Teachers come from middle-class backgrounds. Many supplement household income and are not the sole earners in the families, unlike Shahista's father.

Shahista explains how having seen her father work hard for the family, she aspired to supplement the household income by managing to find a job at a call center at the young age of twenty. While hesitant at first, her father completely supported her decision as long as he picks and drops her off at the office himself. She works from 2 pm to 10 pm. Some nights, she stays at the office till 12 am. Her job description includes reading a script, in English, as a customer services representative for a British telecom company that has outsourced customer service to Pakistan. The starting salary for this job is 25000 rupees.

“Yes, I have long hours, but my parents support me fully. They do not have an issue with my work. Most young women in my college do not work but that doesn't bother me. This way I can help my family”

Unlike her peers, Shahista is quite reserved. She did not engage in conversation eagerly and was very careful with her answers, most of which were restricted to yes and nos. However, a lot of our conversations were over social media, particularly Snapchat where messages and images would disappear after ten seconds.

Shahista is not the only one using digital platforms to communicate, her college has a YouTube channel under the alias: “Get Corrected” and has a display picture that says: God is the greatest. It is a very active channel and uploads content multiple times a week. Uploads include breaking news, important announcements, class lectures, and job postings. The college is very particular to broadcast news vignettes on the channel if they get featured in the local news. A

recent upload was about an event generically titled: Awareness Seminar. A gynecologist and the director of a marketing group funding this seminar talked to the cameramen covering this event. In this short video highlight, the director goes on record to talk about how young young women know everything these days thanks to the internet, but they do not know anything about their personal hygiene. The Gynecologist talks about how there are certain things that students do not know about their own hygiene and the seminar successfully brought awareness. Perhaps pointing towards the principal goes on record to talk about how not only the students but also the teachers enjoyed learning about hygiene. A student also talks about how she got a lot of information through which she is guaranteed a better future. This loose use of the term awareness is interesting because it is used as a catch-all term. This seminar attempts to bring out the modern, progressive face of the state that is enlightening these young women about their personal hygiene – which could be anything ranging from sexual health to menstrual cycles both of which are taboo topics.

The YouTube channel also advertised an announcement for a spring festival with elaborate instructions about the event. Mobile phones were strictly prohibited, and anyone found with one would have to face severe consequences. The no-phone policy was imperative because the video suggests a possible misuse of videos where young women' videos having fun would circulate and people could use them for blackmail and harassment purposes. However, in my recommended videos, I stumbled upon a vlog of the spring festival on YouTube, uploaded by a student who had managed to take her phone in and reported the entire event on video. This student had an alias called Seniora. She showed a side of women's colleges that is often hidden and also allowed me to carry out an ethnography online alongside the physical spaces of colleges. Students dressed up, danced to Bollywood songs, used their phones, and sang along to

the music. The main ground was lined with food stalls and had various rides usually reserved for children. Seniora, as a reporter/vlogger takes us on a tour of this spring festival and she invites her followers to join, informing them that there are still three days left. However, she reminds her followers that this is only for young women, but you can bring your younger siblings or female cousins with you if you wish. Through the lens of her camera, we see her walking around, occasionally dancing with some friends, and showing her viewers the various kinds of food stalls. Her mobility is not limited to the campus. In some of her other videos, she is seen walking on the roads of Lahore. Seniora has dedicated videos of taking the orange train (metro) for the first time, touring the Qaddafi Stadium, and standing in line to get a health card.

While vlogging her experience of taking the orange train for the first time she says:

“I have no idea what I’m doing but I will figure it out.”

When she gets off at the wrong station:

“I got confused. Couldn’t figure out how to get back home. But I can find my way around this city.

I am a brave young woman. I am a very brave young woman.”

Seniora and Shahista both come from aspiring middle-class families where they also contribute to household income. Their aspirations for the future include a university degree and employment. While vlogging (video logging) one of her walks on YouTube, Seniora says:

“I love walking in the wind.”

“We just walked past ITU (Information Technology University). I have a *khawahish* (desire) that I get to study here, and I will one day. InshAllah.”

Her *khawahish* or desire is rooted in ambition. Seniora and Shahista know that stepping out of the boundaries of home and college charters them in an unknown territory which is why

Seniora refers to herself as brave when she is lost. Seniora takes deep pride in the work that she puts in and produces online content about working hard and keeping a positive outlook. She vlogs from an unpainted cemented roof which has a single charpoy (a bed seat). In this one video she tells her viewers about how she passed her exams without taking private tuition, which is expensive. She works part-time as a primary school teacher where she enjoys playing with children. On a hot Friday, Seniora returns from work in one of her videos and sits down on an old wooden table. She is famished and is looking for food. There is no electricity or gas so making something from scratch is out of the question. Her family is sleeping, and she is tiptoeing around. She opens the freezer, which is otherwise empty but has a small container of fresh food. She closes it and frowns at the camera. That food is for my father and brother, she tells the camera as she looks around in the drawers until finds a small packet of roasted lentils. She shows it to her viewers and reminds them that this will not help her hunger, but it will do for now. Seniora sits at the table to eat her snack and the call for prayer is heard in the background. She possibly lives next to a mosque given how loud one can hear it in the video. She waits for the call to prayer to finish and then talks about how she tries to pray as often as she can but sometimes, she slips. She consoles herself. If she is trying, she is on the right path she tells herself.

In *Netnographic Analysis: Understanding Culture Through Social Media* (2014) the authors observe how texts and images are the main forms of representation on the internet and it is important to note that they are produced within a certain context. Beyond this, the internet provides a virtual display of public interactions, how people present themselves, and various interactions on different platforms (Twitter, Facebook, Instagram) that help us map out connections and make sense of the context in which they exist. In addition to that, it is interesting

to note how various platforms represent various kinds of information. Instagram uses images to send a message and create certain narratives while Twitter is a great place for archival research with long threads (chains) of messages and various engagements with them pertaining to global affairs and social issues. YouTube allows for long-form video content to tell personal stories from every day, referred to as vlogging. Seniora's YouTube channel allows for a closer look into the everydayness of her life than an interview for instance. To that end, in this last section, I am making an argument for the importance of digital spaces in creating and exploring an everydayness that may not be possible to achieve in real-time both for me as a researcher and the young women who utilize these platforms. Ayesha, Shahista, and Seniora are all young women trying to imagine alternative ways of being using digital platforms and their mobile phones.

In this chapter, I have mapped out ways in which the mobile phone (and the internet) impacts young college young women, their families, and the social imagination of contemporary Pakistani society. Mobile phone usage and ownership are fraught with complex dilemmas of morality and the uncertainty of what this access can mean for young people, particularly women. While the phone has been incorporated into the Pakistani household and young women like Shahista, Ayesha, and Seniora have utilized its beneficial qualities to learn and extend their sociality in ways that they cannot in public spaces, the benefits of mobile phones vary across class and age (Doron 2012).

Men's use and possession of mobile phones is a common occurrence regardless of their socio-economic status. Unlike women, they are not policed and do not have to share phones at home with other family members. The ownership of cell phones follows patriarchal hierarchies of values that young young women have to negotiate. To that end, mobile phones are centered

around social practices but are also reshaping or destabilizing them by providing room for experimentation. The mobile or cell phone at the same time is also an emblem of the dilemmas and anxieties that the promise of modernity brings with it (ibid). This chapter looks at some of the dilemmas and contradictions that the mobile phone poses by looking at how as an object, this device shapes the power relations in society by being rooted in every day of young women in Pakistan.

Chapter 4

Conclusion

This thesis started with an attempt to understand a policy change that made little sense. The Higher Education Commission Pakistan stated that it will no longer recognize a degree that is the most accessible and populated program in the country. One thing that became clear as I started my fieldwork is that policy announcements and on-the-ground realities are not the same. Throughout my fieldwork, I realized that most of the young women I talked to were unaware of this policy announcement and seemed unfrazzled by the news. This led me to my first chapter on aspirations where I explore what young public college young women dream and aspire to. This chapter lays the groundwork for how multiple young women attending college envision their lives and navigate between aspirations and limitations in their everyday lives. The second chapter frames the heart of this thesis as it zooms into what the college as a space represents for women and young women who are a part of its ecosystem. I explore notions of fun, frivolity, and time pass to see how young women and women create time and space for themselves outside the realms of home and family. Finally, the third and last chapter looks at the mobile phone as an object and access to digital landscapes to understand how morality functions in the contemporary moment but also to look at what kinds of freedoms the mobile phone and internet offer these young women and how they navigate it.

While the ethnographic method is fluid and not constrained by structures of governance, this was primarily an institutional ethnography. I was interested in looking at how structural

hierarchies function and the extent to which they impact the lives of young women. Joan Scott argues that the production of gendered subjects is about power relations (1986). Power lies within the social, the multitude of relationalities that it harbors. Inequality, in turn, is created by knowledge — assigning meaning to something is a political act and this understanding frames my project. Tools to analyze gender are an essential part of my methodology because my intent was to study how power is organized within the structure of the colleges. Gender is not only about studying women (as a socially constructed category), it is about looking at all those categories that are not on the receiving end of power. One of gender theory's main projects has been looking at subjectivity or how subjects are created. Through this project, my biggest takeaway was that young women who are a part of this ecology are not docile and oppressed subjects of control. Through stories and my time spent with these young women, I argue that *potencia* is found in trivial moments of sitting together, joking, passing time, and not doing anything.

These are the themes that my thesis broadly surveys however, this ethnography could have steered in other directions. One deficiency that I recognize is the lack of engagement with the urban and this particularly became evident during my fieldwork at the second college, Dharampura Degree College. Surrounded by public transportation such as the Orange Line Train, and local forms of transportation like the rickshaw and donkey carts I believe this project could have had the potential to explore the urban experience of these young women. During my fieldwork at Dharampura, more so than at Model Town Degree College (MTDC), I noticed that by the end of the day, the young women that I was spending time with would take out their *Burqas* that were stuffed in their bags, and would start putting them on. They would walk outside the gates of the college looking for a rickshaw and on finding one would negotiate the price.

There were many times when the young women, who were on a limited budget, would not have the money to take the rickshaw and they would walk in groups of three or four to their home.

This was not the case in MTDC where young women would rely on their fathers or brothers to pick them up or drop them off. Many had decided with private van owners to pick and drop them or they would take the college bus which had a limited number of seats and a very strict schedule that many young women could not keep up with. This very different experience of the city by the young women of these two colleges itself is something that gives room for an interesting analysis. Young women from the Dharampura College had more mobility in and around the city than their counterparts at MTDC who belonged to families that were socio-economically well off. There was a lot of room to explore how different classes had different relationships with the city and different access to it. However, given the time constraints and my limited ethnographic material on the engagement with the urban, this was an area I was not able to incorporate in my thesis.

While Lahore and its urban landscape was one potentially fruitful area to explore, another particularly interesting area is women who are not from Lahore. Being one of the biggest cities in Punjab, Lahore is the epicenter for educational and job opportunities. People from across cities and provinces apply to universities in Lahore. During my fieldwork, my curiosity led me to the University of Punjab which is the oldest university in the country – established in 1882 under the British colonial rule of the subcontinent. All the degree colleges in Punjab, that were the focus of my research, are affiliated with the University of Punjab. This means that it is the main degree-granting institute for hundreds of affiliated degree colleges. Very few young women and boys from degree colleges go on to study at Punjab University (PU) owing to its high merit admissions. However, I was curious to chase this aspiration as many young women in degree

colleges stated that it would be their dream to attend PU or that they wished their colleges had the freedoms and resources that PU has to offer. While PU has multiple departments and campuses, I made my way to its arts program which is one of the oldest programs that they have to offer. While roaming around the old campus, I came across two young women who seemed as new to the place as I was. Roshane and Mishaal were in their first semester of college and were from the small city of Gujranwala – two hours away from Lahore. They were enrolled in a Pharmacy program. When I asked them how they ended up in Lahore, they explained how Gujranwala did not have a lot of options for universities and so, their high school teacher encouraged them to apply to PU. They were the two smartest young women in their class and had been friends since childhood. The only way their parents would allow them to go to another city was if the other one was going. Both had dreamed of coming to the big city. They explained how they were looking for “enjoyment” and that in their city, everyone knew each other because it was a smaller community and that they were heavily surveilled even if they went out for a walk with their friend. Therefore, they worked hard to come to Lahore where they were living with their relatives because they did not get campus accommodation. We walked over to the bus stand where they pointed to a bus that was leaving with young women piled on top of each other and some were even partially hanging out of the bus. They explained how this bus was free of cost and since it was PU’s own bus service, a lot of young women prefer this over public transportation. Mishaal and Roshane did not hesitate to use public transportation. They used the metro bus and trains to travel and explore various parts of Lahore, usually alone and without supervision. They explained how they had found Lahore to be a safe city as long as they didn’t stay out too late and that their relatives were okay with them being out and about on their own.

Like Mishal and Roshane, many young women from small towns and villages move to

big cities to enjoy and partake in the basic freedom of mobility. In many ways, this thesis was an important project for me because there are certain beliefs and fantasies about young women's behavior that we see in television serials, movies, and literature, and hear about in our everyday conversations. This fantasy itself has colonial roots where the Urdu press through the creation of reformist literature played a major role to spread the idea of change. From Sir Sayed Ahmed Khan to Altaf Hussain Hali and Deputy Nazir Ahmed, these writers started to look at the conditions of the Muslims in the subcontinent after the mutiny of 1857²¹. Through the creation of this new literature, the aim was to create the dichotomy of moral/immoral women. The former was a responsible, educated, homemaker. Responsible for mediating social change while maintaining religious and cultural elements of the home. "Helpmates of the husband and nurturers of the young". The educated woman was now seen as the manager of the domestic realm (Minault 1998). These notions of a moral and good woman have carried on in the nationalist project of Pakistan which also inform the curriculum of public schools and colleges along with the governing philosophies of these institutes. Through my thesis, I am trying to deconstruct these simplistic two-dimensional notions of what a Pakistani woman is. There are no ethnographies of young women in Pakistan, what their lives look like, how they go about their day, what do they do to entertain themselves, how female friends offer communities of support amongst other mundane relationalities that portray a complex picture of women who are always in the background. My thesis is an attempt to start this conversation which has a long way to go.

²¹ After the fall of the Mughal Empire, the Muslim middle class found itself in decline, particularly in comparison to the Hindus who had acclimatized to British rule and had started to reform their middle class early on.

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