The Fate of Tomorrow is in the Hands of Women: Gender, Social Position, and the Media During Zia-ul-Haq’s Islamization Campaign

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My Sisters

My Mother and Grandmother who inspired this project
Introduction:

Deemed nameless and faceless until she has a story considered worthy to tell, the Pakistani woman is portrayed by Western media as having no rights of her own, a victim of patriarchy in an Islamic society. In June 2002, in the village of Meerwala in the Muzaffargarh district of Pakistan, Mukhtar Mai was gang-raped by men of the dominating caste of her village to avenge her “brother’s supposed misconduct” with their family. Her decision to pursue her perpetrators led to international media coverage, her courage widely supported both in Pakistan and internationally. Popular media in the United States called her a “faceless, illiterate, peasant girl from a nowhere village” until she “transcended her role,” in Pakistani society.¹ The efforts of the women supporting her were encouraged and glorified by the United States, as the way women should be fighting for their rights in a country where women did not even know what rights were. Even today the image of Mukhtar Mai represents Pakistani women largely as victims of patriarchy—her courage and resolve portrayed as rarely found among other Pakistani women. The same representation of women as oppressed was capitalized on by Western media, and used in Afghanistan to find legitimacy in the ongoing war in order to show Afghani women how to think and act so that they could be “free.”²

The place that women hold in society in Pakistan, however, is much more complex and multi-faceted than is apparent in media coverage of the case of Mukhtar Mai. The state of women in Pakistan has much to do with economic class, caste, location, and education

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level. As historian Ayesha Jalal states, “Simply put, women belonging to the relatively better-off Pakistani families are not quite the hapless and unsuspecting victims of ‘Islamic’ chauvinism which certain secular critics and especially the ‘feminists’ among them would like to believe.”

Even after taking all of the different factors that played into their lives, however, women were not the nameless and faceless creatures whose “rescue” from Islam could serve as a legitimate cause to wage war. When the history of women in Pakistan is analyzed, Zia-ul-Haq’s regime is seen as the most oppressive and backwards for women and minorities. The recent case of the Christian Pakistani woman Asiya Bibi has been seen a place where these intersect, and as the net result of Zia’s Islamization period in the 1980s. The term “the place of women” is a loaded one. Do women have ‘a’ place, what is this ‘place’ and how should scholarship define it, if it should be defined at all. Thus, in this context I will be analyzing the point when one of the factors that affected women in their everyday lives, through legal changes, was most directly brought backwards—Zia-ul-Haq’s Islamization—in order to understand the way in which women were truly affected by the legal changes made in the name of Islam.

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Chapter One: Background

“It is a crime against humanity that our women are shut up within the four walls of their houses as prisoners. I do not mean that we should imitate the evils of the Western life. But let us try to raise the standards of our women according to our own Islamic ideas and standards. There is no sanction anywhere for the deplorable conditions in which our women have to live. You should take your women along with you as comrades in every sphere of life, avoiding the corrupt practices of western society.”

Muhammad Ali Jinnah, ‘Father of The Nation’ stated this vision of women in a Muslim society—what would become Pakistan—to the Muslim University Union in Aligarh in 1944.

In the years after the creation of Pakistan, Jinnah’s ideas of equality and rights for Pakistani women would be promoted by many of his succeeding leaders. With the creation of the Commission on Marriage and Family Laws by Ayub Khan in 1955, laws were passed to improve the lives of women in the domestic sphere. Under Zulfikar Ali Bhutto women’s rights and equality were placed high on the agenda and discrimination on the basis of sex was prohibited.

The subsequent dictatorship of Zia ul-Haq (1977-1988) has often been looked at as the most repressive period for women’s rights. Zia’s Islamization, many argue, undid much of what had been achieved for women’s rights until then. The imposition of Islamic laws promoted the view that women should stay inside of their homes especially among middle class families. Activist Farida Shaheed says that the problems created by the laws were more a question of creating “an atmosphere in the country whereby all males became the judge of a woman’s modesty and status in society” rather than a direct question of whether or not to

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wear the *chador*. In her study of Pakistani drama serials, Shuchi Kothari contends that media was “manipulated, monopolized, and managed with strict censorship” during the time of Zia-ul-Haq. Shaheed and activist Khawar Mumtaz— who co-edited the commentary on women’s position during Zia’s years: *Women of Pakistan: Two Steps Forward One Step Back?*— argue that Zia’s campaign against obscenity and pornography, which put restrictions on the media images of women, was more a directive to promote domesticated images of women, than it was an initiative to prevent obscenity. Historian Ayesha Jalal argues that many middle and upper class women in fact supported Zia’s Islamization. She says,

“with a few notable exceptions of symbolic dissent—for instance refusal to accept the institution of arranged marriage, or the defiant pursuit of a professional career—most women drawn from these social segments have chosen the path of least resistance.”

Other analysts such as Amy Weiss and Shaheed and Mumtaz, argue that although Islamization created legal changes which discriminated against women, the Zia period in fact saw an increase in women’s involvement in the public sphere. Legal changes during this time had little effect on the way that women viewed their lives and their places in society.

In a study conducted near the end of Zia-ul-Haq’s dictatorship, Farida Shaheed conducted a survey through the organization, *Shirkat Gah*, in which she gathered information from 139 households through interviews with all women aged 15 and above. The study was directed towards getting a picture of women’s everyday lives and did not directly pose questions about religion or its role in the lives of women. According to Shaheed, the responses given

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8 Mumtaz and Shaheed pp81
showed three things “(a) the centrality and paramount role of the family in determining the
parameters and experiences of gender definitions (b) the living reality of religion in women’s
lives through prayer, rituals, practice, and (c) the cognitive disconnection between the two.”\textsuperscript{12}

In interviews, the surveyed women described the structures of power in the
household, mostly based on gender and age and explained the restrictions that were imposed
on them as a result of this structure. Research, conducted largely in Karachi and Lahore,
included women from upper, middle, and lower income families. Results varied across
families in different cities and provinces and across class lines, but even the most restrictive
families were seen by the women surveyed not as following religion, but as being
“conservative, narrow-minded, or following the pattern of a particular community or
Pakistani society.”\textsuperscript{13} Here, Shaheed suggests that religion is just one of many different factors
that affect the lives of women, and that even towards the end of Zia-ul-Haq’s Islamization
period, there was not much identification of religion with the amount of control that women
had or was exercised over them by others in their daily lives.

In 1981, Mumtaz and Shaheed described purdah as a status symbol rather than as a
sign of religiosity:

“women who do leave their homes without a veil are categorized by society as either
‘indecent’ or too poor to be of consequence. In order to dissociate herself from both
categories, a woman will cover herself with a ‘cloak of respectability’ (\textit{burqa} or
\textit{chaddar}), which thus becomes a status symbol.”\textsuperscript{14}

Though veiling may have become a status symbol representing ‘respectability’ at a
certain point, it is important to understand how this came to be. Historian Ayesha Jalal,
argues that in British India, \textit{purdah} “symbolized the Indian Muslim’s identity and the
integrity of the community as a whole. Women were confined to household chores and

\textsuperscript{12} Shaheed pp 353.
\textsuperscript{13} Shaheed pp 357.
\textsuperscript{14} Mumtaz and Shaheed pp 30
religious teachings so as to insulate them from the corrupting influences of the public realm.”¹⁵

Many of the respondents to Shaheed’s survey saw women as oppressed by society rather than by Islam. One woman said, “women are the mothers of Prophets… God has given her much honor. Other things depend on our of understanding.” Another woman said that the disadvantages of being a woman are only created by “our imperialistic, materialistic, ignorant, and backwards society.”¹⁶ They did not, however attribute this problem to religion but to social relationships inside their households.

These domestic social relationships might be seen as key sites of power struggles as experienced by ordinary women during the Zia-ul-Haq period. I will explore the nature and implications of women’s focus upon these domestic struggles in this thesis through the analysis of drama serials. Popular depictions of women in the media during this time period included unflattering stereotypes of “feminists” while at the same time depicting an image of women as holding “power” exclusively within the domestic sphere. Representations in drama serials, both written by women and written by men, depicted two polar extremes. On the one end was a portrayal of an alien “western feminism” and on the other was a depiction of an oppressive patriarchal society. Islam itself is not depicted as either the source of women’s problems or as the sole remedy for them.

In my analysis of the Islamization period, I will be looking at representations of and by women in the media as reflected in the Urdu newspaper \textit{The Jang} and in the popular drama serials, \textit{Waris} (1979), \textit{Andhera Ujala} (1984-85), \textit{Tanhaiyan} (1986), and \textit{Parchaiyan}, (1976). I will open my discussion by exploring how social theory has debated different

¹⁵ Jalal quoted in Kothari pp 130
¹⁶ Shaheed pp 362
definitions of power, and then I will reflect upon how these different definitions might apply to the Pakistani woman during the Zia years. I will go on to look at the ways in which women responded to the media and what this meant for their relationship with both the fundamentalist and feminist movements, which were becoming more prominent at the time. Representations in newspaper articles published portrayed women in a domestic light, while letters to the editor showed signs of women of the middle class resisting from within and against the limits that society put on them. In their stories, as well as in the drama serials, they comment on prominent social issues, rather than on religious ones. The women of the middle class, however, were not particularly active in women’s organizations. These women and their families tended to actively participate in the Islamization debates from a relatively fundamentalist perspective, and it is from within those limits that they comment on issues that affect them on a daily basis.

Before beginning, I would like to state that the analysis in this thesis is not in any way meant to idealize the lives of women in Pakistan, or to overlook the amount of inequality that they are and have been faced with, or undermine the struggle that women have been through to obtain rights and face oppression. It is, rather, an attempt to recognize other ways in which the women towards whom Islamization was targeted, the middle class of Pakistan, were affected by it and their responses to it. It is an attempt to analyze governmental and societal forces that acted upon these women in a period when religiosity was becoming increasingly important. It is also an effort to look at the ways in which these women are not merely victims but are active players in society. Many scholars have focused solely on the work of formal women’s organizations and upon recognized activists during this time. At the risk of
neglecting the accomplishments of such women, this thesis is an attempt to look at the discourse between activist women and women of the middle class. Rather than creating a uniformly orthodox Islamic State, Zia’s Islamization movement polarized public opinion and political debate. Women’s political organizations emerged at one pole while proponents of a highly conservative interpretation of Islamic Orthodoxy were at the other extreme. However these binary debates failed to capture the reality of most middle class women’s lives. As the debates raged, middle class women quietly explored problems of identity, relationships and domestic struggle in the same media, creating meaning, participating in the definition of lived Islam, and even resisting the forces that affected them.

**Constitutional Development**

The enforcement of Islamic Law has been used by leaders throughout Pakistan’s history to achieve political goals and attain legitimacy for both themselves and for Pakistan as an “Islamic Republic”—Zia-ul-Haq’s dictatorship was perhaps most exemplary of this manipulation of Islam. After the independence of East Pakistan as a the separate South Asian majority Muslim nation of Bangladesh, the need to find legitimacy for Pakistan as a Muslim State inhabited only by Muslims who, according to Zia’s Orthodox Wahabi upbringing, followed the only true version of Islam, became even more pressing. The imposition of this strict interpretation of Islam would exclude many of the most prevalent interpretations that had historically been practiced in the subcontinent. However, this was not the first such legitimizing campaign, as smaller incidences as well as larger political campaigns in the name of Islam have been present throughout the history of Pakistan.

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17 The Women’s Action Forum and other activist organizations played a large role in creating an active discourse about women’s and civil rights during the Zia years and continue to do so today, See: Mumtaz, Khawar. "Khawateen Mahaz-e-Amal and Sindhani Tehrik: Two Responses to Political Development in Pakistan."
Ayub Khan, second president of Pakistan and a ‘progressive Islamist,’ created the Commission on Marriage and Family Laws and created a number of laws improving the position of women. His support of women and the improvement of their position was tested when Fatima Jinnah, the sister of Muhammad Ali Jinnah, was nominated by the Combined Opposition Parties as their candidate to run against Ayub Khan in 1965.\textsuperscript{18} With this nomination came the question of whether a woman could become leader of a state in the Islamic tradition. Even prominent religious parties such as the Jamaat-i-Islami—which was also a part of the Combined Opposition Parties—had political motives and so supported Jinnah, leaving Ayub Khan to look for other ulema to issue a fatwa against her.\textsuperscript{19}

As the Constitution of Pakistan was drafted multiple times, the principles of equality for women and minorities that were valued by Pakistan’s founders were slowly forgotten. Coming into power, Zia suspended the constitution altogether, later adding amendments that would create legal support for discrimination of women and religious minorities in the name of an Islamic government.

Pakistan had always been an “Islamic” State. From its conception, it was to be a place where Muslims of Hindustan were to enjoy religious freedom and escape persecution from the Hindu majority, “implicit in the demand for Pakistan was the demand for an Islamic State.”\textsuperscript{20} Thus, when the Constitution of 1956 was first being formed, there was general agreement that it should be based on Islamic principles. The nature of these principles, or of an “Islamic Constitution,” however, was an issue that intellectuals and ulema, religious scholars, disagreed on. Some ulema held that an Islamic constitution should “strictly follow

\textsuperscript{18} Haq pp 205 \\
the patterns of the republic of the Early Caliphs in the 7th century” without any additions or changes. Intellectuals agreed with the purpose of Pakistan as an Islamic State, but closely adhered to the principles of democracy, and opposed this narrow definition of an Islamic Constitution, instead trying to synthesize modern needs with Islamic Principles.\footnote{Choudury pp 245}

Despite discussions between Islamic Scholars and the framers of the Constitution of 1956, the final product was “mainly a collection of secular laws for the administration of a democratic form of government.”\footnote{Choudury pp 245} The Islamic nature of the constitution was very general, including clauses, which stated that “steps will be taken to enable the Muslims of Pakistan … to order their lives in accordance with the Holy Quran and Sunnah.”\footnote{Constitution of Pakistan 1956, Article 25} The most restrictive section of this Constitution in terms of religious freedom, Article 198, “no law shall be enacted which is repugnant to the existing principles of Islam as laid down in the Holy Quran and Sunnah” and “existing law shall be brought into conformity with such injunctions.”\footnote{Constitution of Pakistan 1956, Article 198} This constitution protected minority rights and showed little sign of discrimination against non-Muslims and women stating “every citizen has the right to profess, practice, and propagate any religion; and every religious domination and every sect thereof has the right to establish, maintain, and manage its religious institutions.”\footnote{Constitution of Pakistan 1956 Article 16} Because they were so general, the Islamic provisions in the Constitution of 1956 did not satisfy the ulema’s concept of an Islamic state.\footnote{Choudury pp 245}

This constitution was abrogated in 1958 by self-imposed military leader, General Ayub Khan, who promised the nation that constitutional law would soon be reinstated. The
Constitution of 1962 imposed a shift from the parliamentary system to the presidential system. The main Islamic provisions remained similar to the 1956 Constitution, declaring that the government would create an atmosphere that would enable the Muslims of Pakistan to live according to the principles of the Holy Quran and Sunnah. Ayub Khan’s Constitution, like the one before it, also appointed an “advisory Council of Islamic Ideology” and an “Islamic Research Institute,” both of which would help to serve the purpose of promoting an Islamic way of life.27

This constitution was also short-lived, however, as it was abrogated in 1969 by Ayub Khan himself as he handed power over to military leader Yahya Khan, and was not succeeded until 1973 by the Constitution implemented during the time of Zulifqar Ali Bhutto, which would give women more rights than any of its predecessors, containing a number of provisions that strengthened women’s legal status, ensured equality before the law, and reserved seats in for women in parliament.28

Even with the greater role of Islamic Institutions stressed in the Constitution of 1962, fundamentalist religious scholars were not content with the extent to which both of these constitutions were “Islamic.” Pakistani religious scholar and political leader, Maulana Fazlur Rahman wrote in 1970 on the failure of both of these constitutions to be Islamic. He argues that “Islam appears in these constitutions as an item among a host of other matters of goals and policy.”29 He goes on to say that where Islam appears, it is “essentially as a limitation, as a bounding or limiting concept rather than as a positive or creative factor whence positive

27 Choudury pp 246
28 Ali pp 45
results are derived as values, goals or programmes for human progress and enrichment.”

Zia was able to use these views to his advantage to support the fact that the Constitution of 73 was not Islamic enough and needed to be revised through “Islamization.” In 1979, Zia’s addition of the Hudood Ordinances made this constitution, which originally created freedom to practice any religion and granted women the most rights among any of its predecessors, much more restrictive.

The Hudood Ordinances were a set of six Ordinances that attempted to Islamize criminal law. These laws provided for criminal offences to be tried on the grounds of hadd punishments laid out in the Quran and Sunnah, and Tazir, which allowed for court discretion as to the form and measurement of the punishment. The changes made by the Hudood Ordinances were discriminatory against women in many ways, most importantly, the new laws required the evidence of four adult male witnesses for the crime of zina (sexual intercourse outside of marriage) and zina bil jabr (rape) to be liable to hadd punishment. In this way, cases of rape were turned around against the victim-- particularly in rural areas where the literacy rate was lower than in cities. Rather than the victim’s perpetrators being charged for rape, she herself would be convicted for adultery. Further, his imposition of directives on Islamic dress through “the much publicized campaign against obscenity and pornography” and his attempt to confine women to Chador and Char Divari or “veil and four walls” in order to “protect the sanctity of the family” created an active discourse between women’s activist groups and orthodox interpreters of the Quran.

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30 Rahman pp 276
32 Ali pp 47
Chapter Two: Zia as President

“I will tell you what Islam and Pakistan means to me,” Zia said in a International Conference on Islam in 1983, “It is a vision of my mother struggling on tired, with all her worldly possessions in her hands when she crossed the border into Pakistan.” Zia would use this vision of Pakistan as a refuge for Muslims, which so many Pakistanis held so dear, to his advantage throughout his dictatorship.

Muhammad Zia-ul-Haq was born on August 12, 1924, into what some call a ‘humble’ background. His family was of the lower middle class, and his father worked for the British government. Despite their lack of resources, Zia graduated from St. Stephen’s College in Delhi in 1944. He was raised in a strict Wahabi Islam background, in which believers can only connect with God through teachings of the Quran and Sunnah, sayings of the Prophet Muhammad. Zia joined the British Indian Army and was commissioned into the Indian Cavalry in 1945. Throughout his army career, he developed a relatively un-interested view in politics, among the main reasons that Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto appointed him as Chief of Army Staff in March 1976 after the end of Tikka Khan’s term. What Bhutto took to be disinterest would soon turn on him and lead to his own demise.

While Bhutto’s success was largely dependent on his association with the aristocratic class, he claimed to be the voice of the poor. Bhutto wrote from his jail cell in 1978, “It may sound a rotten cliché if I say that I am a household word in every home under every roof that leaks rain. I have an eternal bond with the people which armies cannot break.” Shahid Burki, former economic advisor to Pakistan’s Ministry of Commerce, says that Bhutto’s disconnect with the middle class, and Zia’s close ties to it, created the conflict that would

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33 Baxtor and Burki pp5
34 Baxtor and Burki pp6
35 Bhutto in Burki pp6
bring Zia out on top. The middle class “regarded the PPP government un-Islamic and anti-middle class, unmindful and disrespectful of the ‘ideology of Pakistan’... to provide Islam a secure place in South Asia.” 36 When the middle class began to protest, the allegiances of Zia and his officers to their middle class background, to which most of the army belonged, were tested. After the elections of 1977, when Zia’s officers refused to use force on middle class protesters against Bhutto, Zia knew that he could no longer support Bhutto through force—his political career was to begin.

“The politically inexperienced General Zia, who combines an austere orthodox Moslem outlook with the mustache and personal bonhomnie of the British officers who trained him appeared as a national savior when he seized power at a time of wild political disorder,” The New York Times reported in April 1979. 37 After removing Bhutto from office and detaining him in July of 1977, Zia placed the country under martial law, naming himself Chief Martial Law Administrator. 38 Any positive “perception of Zia was transformed by Mr. Bhutto’s death,” 39 in which he played a large role. A few days after he seized power, Zia decreed Islamic punishments for certain crimes. On September 16, 1978, he was sworn in as Pakistan’s sixth president, and in February of the next year, Islamic law was set down as the supreme law of Pakistan.

His initial popularity was, for the middle class, reinforced by his imposition of Islamic Law, while any popularity that he may have had with the upper classes was “transformed by Mr. Bhutto’s death.” Opinion about Zia was split from the outset. Although he was never very popular among the poor, he appealed more to the middle class and so on

36 Burki pp7
37 New York Times. April 1979
38 Burki pp 155
one end, supporters of the government in the form of the Jamat-i-Islami, most of whom also came from the middle classes, claimed that Islamization was the path that Pakistan should have always taken as an Islamic nation and in doing so, was true to its identity. Opponents of Islamization claimed that it was implemented not for religious purposes, but to legitimize Zia’s otherwise baseless position as leader. In his search for legitimacy, Zia’s regime reworked the Constitution of 1973, adding ordinances and acts; rearranging the workings of the government to his definition of what was Islamic. According to Zia, “in Islamic democracy, a decision taken by majority will only be valid if it conforms with Islamic teachings; otherwise it will be rejected all together.”

Zia-ul-Haq imposed many changes to the 1973 Constitution that almost changed the original completely. In his years as leader, Zia would add ordinances to the Constitution that would directly discriminate against minorities for the first time in Pakistan’s history through not only legal changes made, but through mass media.

As political opposition was silenced and elections were “postponed” multiple times, but never actually held, control of the media was essential in maintaining control of the country. In October of 1979, Zia banned opposition political parties and meetings, shut down some periodicals, and created strict laws of censorship for the rest of the media. In November of the same year, Zia “amended the penal code to permit imprisonment of journalists who published ‘defamatory material.’” In March of 1981, Zia issued a law, which would allow him to amend the constitution. In 1979, he declared that Muslims and non-Muslims would

40 Weiss 1985
42 Kothari pp3
43 Burki pp159
44 Burki pp163
vote in separate electorates.\textsuperscript{45} Social commentators wrote on the censorship of the press in 1980, “Large blank spaces, representing censored materials, which previously could be found only in avowedly leftist publications like the Lahore weekly \textit{Viewpoint} now are regular features of standard dailies like \textit{Dawn}.”\textsuperscript{46} An analysis of the publications of \textit{Dawn} showed that one fourth of the materials that were censored were letters to the editor. In October of 1980, journalists gathered in five cities to protest the censorship of the press, organized by the Pakistan Federal Union of Journalists and the All-Pakistan Newspaper Editors Convention. In April of 1982, religious student organization \textit{Islami Jamiat i Tulaba} attacked newspaper offices in Lahore for their coverage of the government’s Islamization. In March of the next year, Zia lifted formal censorship but warned that the media should practice “self-censorship.”\textsuperscript{47} In May of 1984, reporting on all “outlawed” political parties was banned—leaving all coverage to be of the military. In December of 1985, after many postponed elections and promises to lift military law, parliament passed a bill to bring back banned political parties, a step in the direction towards holding elections.

Zia’s control of media is demonstrated in the \textit{Urdu Digest} a monthly Pakistani digest, which began publication in 1961 and continued throughout Zia’s dictatorship. Although there was consistently an emphasis on Islam and faith throughout the publication of these magazines, the issues published near the beginning of the Zia period presented more direct and verbal support for him, while later publications, \textit{showed} the influence of Islamization rather than directly stating support for it. “All leaders before Zia-ul-Haq only that there is an Islamic rule of law, but did nothing to support this” In a 1979, one letter to the editor, praised

\textsuperscript{46} Richter and Gustafson pp 191
\textsuperscript{47} Burki pp167
and supported Zia. The editors prominently placed this statement in support of Zia near the beginning of the publication. The letter also went on to say “the whole state needs reform” and further that all of Pakistan should support Zia in his actions to improve the state of the government of Pakistan. Later issues of the same publication demonstrate their support by publishing pieces by the widely popular fundamental Islamic scholar Maulana Abdul Maududi, who was also largely Zia’s theological inspiration. Publications in 1982 and 1983 include sections of translations of the Quran by Maulana Abdul Maududi, and other sections of literature by him.

By the end of Zia’s dictatorship, Amnesty International had charged the government with torture, imprisonment, and human rights abuses, hundreds of thousands had protested for political and economic rights, thousands had been imprisoned and killed in violence resulting from these protests, and hundreds had been tortured to death for their political beliefs. To many, the hanging of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto in April 1979 put a face to of this suffering— its retribution sought actively even today. The obvious reasons behind Zia’s repression of political dissent was to keep his hold on the government as strong as possible. Religious scholars who advised Zia also opposed political parties on the basis that the Muslim community or ummah “must not unite in error.” Division, in the form of political parties would indicate error within the Islamic community.

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48 Urdu Digest November 1979, pp13
49 Urdu Digest November 1983 and August 1981
50 Baxter 1985 pp 115
Zia’s Theological Inspiration and Its Manifestation in the Media: The Fundamentalist Perspective and Parallel Workspaces for Women

The term “Islamic Fundamentalism” has been used by scholars to describe the form of Islam, which strictly adheres to the fundamentals laid out in the Quran and Sunnah. Maulana Syed Abdul a’la Maududi has been known as one of the most influential leaders of this movement in Pakistan. The success of Maududi’s writings helped greatly to shape public opinion in Pakistan in the years after its creation, particularly after Islamization. In addition to this, Maududi’s ideologies influenced political figures such as Zia-ul-Haq, and religious leaders such as Dr Israr Ahmed. Further, his Jamaat-e-Islami, created in 1941 in British India to promote Islamic ideals, became an influential voice in not only propagating orthodox interpretations of Islam, but in the political arena as well.51

Popular TV shows as well as magazines became widely representative of the opinions of these leaders, which spread fully throughout Pakistan for the first time since its independence, increasing adherence to the strict Orthodox interpretation of Islam in popular opinion. Maududi’s fundamentalist perspective widely influenced both in South Asia as well as the rest of the Muslim world. Maududi founded the Jamaat-i-Islami in 1941, it is often argued that his Jamaat-i-Islami provided the ideological support that Zia-ul-Haq needed to come into and stay in power. Others argue that Maududi was most influential in the beginning of Zia-ul-Haq’s government, but as his reign went on, Zia began to look for less fundamentalist support in the Muslim world.52

This fact was also reflected in Zia’s support of prominent media figures such as Dr. Israr Ahmed who was given a program on the state-run channel PTV. Israr was a strict

51 Ali 49
fundamentalist in his views about how an Islamic state should be properly run; he had also been influenced by Maulana Abdul Maududi, although he disagreed with him in some respects, leaning towards an even more fundamentalist viewpoint. Where Maududi had compromised and said that a woman could in fact become leader of the State in the case of Fatimah Jinnah, the sister of Muhammad Ali Jinnah, Israr contended that such a thing would not be allowed in an Islamic state under any circumstances.  

Israr argued that women should not be outside of their homes except in cases of extreme emergencies. In his program Israr would lecture about Islam and preach a “fundamental” translation of the Quran. During this period he made many controversial statements that angered the Women’s Action Forum (WAF) and isolated and excluded minority Muslim sects. He stated in an interview in 1982 that as long as women were working and outside of their homes, men could not be tried for rape or assault cases. He preached strictly about purdah, contending that if women did go outside of their homes in cases of emergencies, they should be escorted by a male relative and fully covered, including the face. The WAF responded strongly to Israr’s comments about the role of women in society, demonstrating outside of PTV headquarters in Karachi in 1981. After this incident, Israr made more controversial comments about women’s’ role in an Islamic state, and a few days later, his show was taken off of PTV, although PTV claimed that this was pre-scheduled.

Dr Israr Ahmed created much controversy in Pakistan through his assertions about the role of women in society. Israr first came on Pakistan Television in 1981 in his weekly

53 Ali 49
54 Shaheed and Mumtaz pp 81
program *Al Huda.* Dr. Israr Ahmed was very much influenced by Maulana Abdul Maududi early in his career. Further, Israr’s book *Islamic Renaissance: The Real Task Ahead,* and his programmes on PTV spread views of fundamentalist Islam throughout the middle class of Pakistan. Although many of his comments were very extreme, Israr’s comments did not directly and uniformly affect public opinion. Women’s enrollment to higher education and their presence in the workforce actually increased during the Zia years. Instead of transforming Pakistani into a uniformly Islamic state holding fundamentalist views, this, in fact, led to the creation of two extreme groups of people. On the one end was a group whose existing understanding of Islam was supported by Israr and by the law so that, as Shaheed and Mumtaz point out, they would not hesitate to reprimand a woman who did not cover her hair in public. At the other extreme the women and their families, who applied for higher education and went into the workforce in ever increasing numbers. During these years, the call for women to stay home led to demands for segregated workplaces which would allow “millions of women to get employment in ‘Islamic’ conditions.”

This strategy of demanding female employment in “Islamic conditions” is an example of resisting from within their prescribed roles in society, the limits of which are outlined by historian Ayesha Jalal. In this case, the creation of segregated workplaces demonstrates the dynamic nature of fundamentalism. The study demonstrated that although fundamentalist women called for *purdah* and seclusion, they had slowly moved away from this and had supported the creation of “Islamic” workplaces. The fundamentalist women that the study shows here took a stand that opposed the one taken by the women involved in the WAF. Like

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55 Shaheed and Mumtaz pp 83
57 Jalal 1991
the leaders of the WAF, these women also promoted social change, but did so in a way, which did not challenge the “limits” created by the ideology promoted by Dr. Israr and the increasingly popular view of women in Islam. These women then had the support of the government and the backing of the middle class.

Israr repeatedly asserted that the proper role of a woman in an Islamic society was inside the home. As Mumtaz and Shaheed point out, Israr also commented on how a woman should dress, according to him her whole body including her face was to be covered. Many scholars argue that this period was perhaps the most repressive time period in Pakistan’s history in terms of the development of women’s rights, while the creation of a “Women’s Division” in the Cabinet Secretariat and appointment of a second “Commission on the Status of Women,” created a paradox for the regime.

Legal changes made to the constitution were not the only places where this happened, however, as media portrayals not only contributed to Islamization, but also reflected it. Dr Israr’s television programmes were a key place where this occurred. On his program *Al-Huda*, Israr stated, “the present state of the country is in the hands of men, but its future is in the hands of women.”58 This theme, of the future being in the hands of women through their ability to change the way that children are raised, also recurs in popular media of the time. Scholars such as Shaheed and Mumtaz would argue that such a position puts women into a fixed role that she must carry out and only then will she be a good Muslim woman who is accepted by society. However, this analysis only sheds light on how such thinking limits women, and does not take into account that many Pakistani women did view the role of motherhood as empowering.

Zia-ul-Haq’s Islamization campaign, then, did not so much bring all of Pakistani society into a fundamentalist state, as it polarized those holding fundamental beliefs and the upper class educated elite. During this period, activist organizations such as the WAF were created to respond to changes in law. Further this polarization is clearly illustrated in the WAF’s protests against Dr. Israr. While Israr programs perpetuated ideologies about the place of women in society as inside of the home, which affected many Pakistanis, the WAF and women’s movements also gained support, as shown through the growing number of women joining the workforce in ‘Islamized’ workspaces.

Sociologist Deniz Kandiyoti addresses identity in the Muslim world in a post-colonial context. She says that “The failure of Muslim states to generate ideologies capable of realistically coping with social change and their histories of colonization has meant that they rely on Islam not only as the only coherent ideologies at their disposal but also as a symbol of their cultural identity and integrity. This has had extremely serious repercussions for women... (since) the control of women became the last bastion of cultural identity to be tenaciously defended.”\(^{59}\) Thus, in order to understand the social implications that Zia’s Islamization had on society at large, one must understand the position of women in that society.

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Definitions of “Power”

When Israr asserted that the future was “in the hands of women,” he was interpreting the role of women as mothers as one through which they hold power. The term “power” has been used in many different ways in different contexts. Merriam-Webster defines it as “the ability to act or produce an effect” or “possession of control or authority over others.” While popular definitions of power may range from absolute control over others to everyday decision-making, Shaheed and Mumtaz associate power with economic independence. They argue, writing in 1987, towards the end of Zia’s years, that in Pakistani society “women who have any access to power, whether it is in terms of education, class or economic resources, will have lifted themselves out of the general mould of ‘the’ Pakistani woman.”60 Taking the point of view of activist organizations, Mumtaz and Shaheed describe the importance of economic independence and working outside of the home in their description of power.

In contrast to this, Fatima Suraiyya Bajjia, a prominent drama writer, whose drama serials could be seen on PTV throughout Zia’s years, suggests that the nature of power is completely different. Bajjia argues that women in her life were always powerful,

“In my own life...55 years ago I have seen my own family women, my mother, my grandmother, in a position of power. My father and grandfather could not wear clothes until approved by women! They had mobility. The women used to go to English tailors and order their husband’s suits. The cars that were imported during that time, came with specially fitted curtains so that the women who traveled in them did not have to wear burqa (veil)... I have seen that world, it was rich, fulfilling”61

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60 Mumtaz and Shaheed pp 33
61 Bajjia quoted in Kothari pp59
Such an interpretation “power” represents almost a complete redefinition of the term, so, one might argue, reducing its significance altogether. However, other scholars have similarly observed alternative ways in which meaning is created and resistance is formed.62

Shaheed and Mumtaz argue that through this sort of representation of women as always a member of a family and, having an identity as a sister, mother, wife, or daughter, women have no identity of their own. They say that “most Pakistani women do not have an identity of their own. They are the sister, daughter, mother or wife of a man and depend entirely on him for their economic needs.”63 Here the authors equate having an “identity” with a woman’s dependence on someone for “economic needs;” without oversimplifying the statement that they make, the suggestion seems to be that women only have their ‘own’ identity if they are able to make money.

Bajjia’s analysis of the roles that the women in her life played in relation to the household and the rest of the family seems slightly romanticized, and to some the fact that these women’s ‘power’ lay in their ability to make decisions about the clothes that their husbands wore may even seem like trivialization of the term. Bajjia also discusses women’s lives in the zanana or women’s quarters, of the home. She explains that life in the zanana was “dominated by women” and that “a man could do whatever he wanted outside his home, but when he came home he had to wash, clean up, change his clothes and only then could he enter the zanaana.”64 This again seems like a statement that would prescribe certain domestic roles for women as Shaheed and Mumtaz would argue television had been doing at this time. The situations that Bajjia describes, of women being able to shop without having to worry about purdah, or the empowerment that she describes her mother and grandmother seems as

63 Shaheed and Mumtaz pp 30
64 Bajjia quoted in Kothari pp 59
though it is less about power and more about being seen as the holder of honor and having the privilege to protect that honor not only for herself, but also for her family. This was however, also an extremely large burden placed on the shoulders of these women.

Lila Abu-Lughod, observes alternative methods of resistance in her ethnography of Awlad Ali Bedouins. She observed “irreverence toward men the joking of women, minor defiances of traditional modesty and sexuality hidden in poetry and subservient acts of women to block unwanted arranged marriages.” In this way, women created power for themselves within the framework of male power. Anthropologist Naveed-i-Rahat, gives a definition similar by recognizing the importance of certain aspects of women’s lives, which are traditionally overlooked by scholars. She comments on the role of women in a village in Punjab in 1975. In her study, she highlights the amount of work women do in the domestic setting, and the role women play in maintaining “reciprocal relationships” and emphasizes the importance of these relationships to the social structure of the village, women “are the providers of essential elements for social continuity, co-operation and tolerance.” She says that reciprocal relationships ensure the success of various occasions, maintain social links, strengthen the social base, and facilitate work done by men. Kothari notes that Bajjia’s plays emphasize the importance of rituals in households. Rahat also explains the extent of “interdependence” in the village between not only family, extended family, and villagers, but also between men and women. “The family’s main income earner is male, but the major economic contribution to the family subsistence is made by the females in Khalabat.” She says, “a married woman has the responsibility to produce children, to educate them, to care


67 Naveed-i-Rahat pp 77
for them.” Rahat interprets her findings in a way, which implies the importance of women deviating from traditional definitions of power, and look recognizes alternative ways in which women create meaning. Rahat further recognizes the role that changes in law and directives, which were being hotly debated by activist groups and orthodox interpreters, played in the lives of these women. She observes that, even under Zia’s Islamization, the women of this village did not observe purdah that the women of this village do not observe purdah and their mobility is not restricted. “frequent interaction with other women of the village...provides them with a chance to exchange information and knowledge of village affairs.”

Historian Gail Minault explains the significance of the zanaana in nineteenth century India, women’s “lives were claustrophobic, but rich in human contact. Comfort was never very far away, but neither was condemnation. There were always other females around to talk to, defer to, order around, quarrel with, laugh or cry with, or curse.” Further, Shaheed explained that for the majority of the women interviewed “the family is the location of identity, social interaction and support, but also the seat of patriarchal control where definitions of gender are most immediately experienced.” The observations outline the importance of relationships in a society that revolves around the domestic sphere as such.

Sociologist Zeenat Ahmed analyzed both social relationships in the family and kin, as well as izzat, in their analysis of the position of women in tribal Pakhtun societies in the North-West Frontier Provence of Pakistan (now Khybar-Pakhtun Khawa). She wrote,

“ideally women are conceptualized as forming two opposite and polar models. Mor, the mother, on the one hand, with emotive echoes from the common saying of the Prophet of Islam that heaven lies beneath the feet of the mother. On the other hand,
where her chastity has been compromised and the honour of her close agnatic kin - father, husband or brothers - is at stake, she is considered in a state of *tor*, literally black.”

This concept of the mother being a place of power, and of heaven as beneath the feet of the mother appears with more frequency during the Zia era. This idea was present throughout popular media of the time—from the strictly orthodox television programs of Dr. Israr to popular drama serials of the time.

As is pointed out in Shaheed’s 1988 study, the most important aspects of woman’s lives were, even in the period of Islamization, were social issues such as relationships and *izzat* or honor. Both of these are viewed as not only creating power, but also creating an immense burden, as many have analyzed before. While there was an active voice in women’s organizations such as the WAF that called for more women to come out onto into public work-spaces, and while the creation of “Islamic” work-spaces did increase women’s visibility in the public sphere most women still did not join the workforce.

In this study, Shaheed also looked at the ways in which families exercised authority over women, and these women’s responses to that authority. When asked why these women accepted the decisions of authorities, many responded that parents had their best interest at heart and so these women trusted them to make their life decisions, as well as have control over everyday decisions such as what they wear and where they go. Some women cited reasons related to economics, because they depend on their husband for economic needs, they allowed them to make decisions in their lives. Along with parents and husbands, these decisions were also made by mothers and mothers-in-law, while the women themselves exercised control over children and younger siblings. What is referred to in Shaheed’s analysis as “control” (over children and younger siblings) is referred to as “power” to shape

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71 Ahmed pp 31
72 Shaheed 2002 pp 355
the future in popular media during the Zia years. In their analysis of the definition of power, Mumtaz and Shaheed do not acknowledge more subtle ways in which power is created, which Rahat and Abu-Lughod recognize. Thus the struggles over Islamization were not only about how to define Islamic identity, they were struggles over how to define female power.
Chapter Three: Activism and The Women’s Action Forum

The Women’s Action Forum became the biggest challenge for Zia’s Islamization campaign. It was in fact the discriminatory nature of Zia’s Hudood Ordinances, which led to the creation the Woman’s Action Forum to specifically protect the rights of women.\textsuperscript{73}

Created in 1981, the Women’s Action Forum was the legacy of a long history of movements by women to improve their position on issues such as education, purdah, suffrage, and legal rights. Professor of Law Shaheen Sardar Ali notes, even before partition, these issues were being addressed by both Muslim and non-Muslim women. Muslim women also played an active role in the creation of Pakistan, during which time “issues of women’s rights were relegated to the background.”\textsuperscript{74} The Pakistan movement was the third movement that Muslim women actively participated in (the first two: the education movement led by Syed Ahmed Khan and the Khilafat movement to support the institution of the Khilafat in Turkey) and was a major break from the traditional household role that they had had so far. Ali contends that after this movement “the leadership expected women who had participated in active public life of the nation for more than a decade to go back quietly into their homes and abdicate their new-found political and civic consciousness to their male colleagues.”\textsuperscript{75}

After the creation of Pakistan and during the government’s first few years of lawmaking, many women’s organizations such as the Women’s Voluntary Service (1948), the Women Naval Reserve Force (1948), the Pakistan Women’s National Guards (1948), and a number of women’s workers unions were created.


\textsuperscript{74} Ali pp 42

\textsuperscript{75} Ali pp 43
When the first case of a sentence to be ordained by Hudood Ordinances was given, in 1981, the public, particularly women’s groups, reacted strongly. Fehmida and Allah Bux had legally married, but without the approval of their families. In order to rescue their daughter, Fehmida’s parents filed the case as abduction, without realizing that if it is was proven as such, then it would become one of zina. The couple received the penalty of stoning to death and a hundred lashes each. This can legitimately be seen as “the take-off point of the women’s movement in Pakistan.” After hearing of the sentence, “women’s organizations and concerned women came together to discuss the ways of countering the reactionary onslaught.” The informal meetings of these women would become the Khawateen Mahaz-e-Amal or, the Women’s Action Forum. The Fehmida and Allah Bux case, was later taken up by an accomplished lawyer in Islamic Jurisprudence, Khalid Ishaq, whose appeal for the defendants led to the dismissal of the case.

Shaheed and Mumtaz argue that the creation of the WAF was also in response to two major trends: first, the growing trend to segregate women, which they saw as a part of a larger trend to move women back into their homes, and second, measures that were being proposed in the name of Islam. So, its first campaign demanded five basic points: the Family Laws Ordinances, which were created in the 1960s to protect rights of women in several ways, be strengthened; women be given protection in police custody; the ban on women’s participation in sports be lifted; financial resources that would be used to create a separate universities for women be put into providing basic literacy for women; and that the ban on cultural activities in educational institutions be lifted. Although the creation of the WAF was sparked by the case of Fehmida and Allah Bux, which provided it with the motivation it

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76 Ali pp 48
77 Mumtaz 1991, pp 104
78 Mumtaz and Shaheed pp 74
needed to “mount resistance” against discriminatory laws campaigns such as these ultimately targeted women of the upper classes and urban areas.

During Zia’s dictatorship, Shaheed and Mumtaz argue, women realized that in order to guarantee their own rights, they would have to be mobilized themselves and more women would have to be made conscious of their rights to preserve them. The Law of Evidence, under which the testimony of a woman in a court of law would count as half that of the testimony of a Muslim man, was highly contested by women’s organizations. On February 13, 1983, the Punjab Women’s Lawyer Association, called for a demonstration to march down Mall Road, one of the most crowded areas of the city. About 300 women from various organizations gathered to protest The Law of Evidence. Confrontation followed as a group of about 500 police were ready to face the gathering—fifty women were arrested, and several were hurt. This was a high point in the development of the WAF, according to Shaheed and Mumtaz, after this point, “women were being taken seriously; by politicians, for having had the courage to defy existing restrictions; by the government, for having the ability to create a law and order situation; and by other women, who were forced to examine the proposed law which had moved women like them to take on the State.”

After a number of demonstrations following this one, and the WAF’s action in meeting with members of the Majlis-e-Shoora, a branch of government Zia set up in the place of parliament, a law was passed a year and a half later making the evidence of a man and a woman acceptable in the absence of two male witnesses, at the discretion of the court.

In 1983, Safia Bibi, an 18 year old blind girl was raped first by her landlord’s son and then by her landlord himself in whose home she worked as a domestic servant. After she

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79 Mumtaz and Shaheed pp 75
80 Mumtaz and Shaheed pp 107
gave birth to an illegitimate child, her father filed report for the case of rape. According to the *Hudood* Ordinances, however, there was not enough evidence against her rapists; both men were let go without charges. Further, Safia Bibi’s pregnancy was seen as proof of *zina* for which she was sentenced to three years of imprisonment, public lashing, and a fine of 1000 rupees. The sentence itself shocked the public. The WAF responded by bringing to public attention the fact that this case was reported by Safia Bibi’s father as rape, but had been turned into a case of adultery by the judge. The WAF then publicized the case both in Pakistan and internationally, after which, due to “international embarrassment,” it was quickly reviewed and the verdict annulled.\(^81\) The cases of Fehmida and Allah Bux and Safia Bibi were the two most well-known cases of *Hudood* punishment that the WAF took up, although there were similar cases which women’s organizations also lobbied against. Despite the measures taken by WAF, however, “over 1500 women were in gaols all over Pakistan under the Zina Ordinance in 1988 as opposed to only 70 for various crimes in 1977.”\(^82\)

Zia’s regime led to the creation of the WAF, a model of activism, and separated society into two main groups regarding their views on women’s rights. The model of activism and resistance pursued by the WAF was one of these groups while the other firmly held to the belief that women under an Islamic regime were truly empowered through their position as mother, controlling the future of the nation—feeding into the highly valued concept nationalism as Pakistan developed as a nation.

Looking into the role of the WAF and other women’s organizations in “emancipating” the women of Pakistan from their present state of oppression also sheds light on the way power dynamics are created between the organization and the women that they

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\(^81\) Mumtaz and Shaheed pp 101  
\(^82\) Mumtaz 1991 pp 103
hope to emancipate, and, further, the way that the lives of these women have been perceived by such organizations. Shaheed and Mumtaz argue that, “Recognizing that most women live a life of oppressive drudgery and are well aware of their oppressed state, WAF started from the premise that to call them to meetings where privileged women would tell them how miserable their lives actually were would be to add insult to injury.”\textsuperscript{83} In their explanation of their role in relation to women of lower classes, these activists label lower class women as living lives of oppression and drudgery, without looking attempting to understand their lives in any way other than what the “Commission of the Status of Women” states. Though abject poverty had doubtless been a reality for thousands of women, organizations such as the WAF took only this one-sided perspective in their attempt to understand women of lower classes.

Shaheed also comments on the role that women’s organizations played during Zia’s decade and the problems that activist groups such as the WAF had in gaining the support of Pakistani women. She says that these organizations failed to mobilize large groups of women during Zia’s dictatorship for two main reasons. First, the women who had resisted most were those who did not face other forms of oppression such as class, ethnic, or religious, and so felt gender discrimination “most acutely.”\textsuperscript{84} Second, these organizations were largely a reaction to changes made by the government and for many Pakistani women, “the formal legal system has little reality until they are personally confronted by its implications.”\textsuperscript{85} Here Shaheed also acknowledges the issues of class, which came between activist groups and Pakistani Women. Further, she addresses the role of these organizations in responding to legal issues. This fact differentiates the resistance of women’s organizations from the resistance of middle class women, which will be discussed later in the chapter. While WAF

\textsuperscript{83} Mumtaz and Shaheed pp 135
\textsuperscript{84} Shaheed 2002 pp 373
\textsuperscript{85} Shaheed 2002 pp 374
resisted in reaction to legal changes in the name of Islam, middle class women resisted, though very subtly, to issues that affected them. Shaheed and Mumtaz point out that most of the work that the WAF did, took place among “professional women in urban working centers” while most of the effects of the Hudood Ordinances were felt in the poor rural and the urban middle-lower and working classes.

Popular response to the WAF, was far from one of acceptance. As activism grew, it was popularly labeled as “western” thought, not inherently “Islamic,” and so, illegitimate in the context of Pakistan. Shaheed and Mumtaz also recognized that reactionary forces gave activism the label of “‘westernization,’ to discredit any forces that aim at social or economic progress.” In order to gain support, activists recognized that all of their activities had to be in conformity with Islamic teachings. Shaheed says, “as long as Islam plays a central role in Pakistani culture, an Islamic framework is a necessity and not a choice for social change.”

In relation to this, Ayesha Jalal explains the concept of what she calls “convenience of subservience.” She says,

> “the class origins of those who have been involved in the ‘feminist’ movement have been the decisive factor in the articulation of women’s issues at the level of the state. Educated, urban, middle and upper class in the main, these women have toyed with notions of emancipation but carefully resisted challenging their prescribed roles in society. Such deference is merely the outward expression of a deeper and largely subjective consideration: the stability of the family unit and by implication of the social order itself.”

Historian Bruce Lawrence points out that feminism in Pakistan remained “socially conservative.” The “feminism” of these women’s organizations, however, was not conservative if the context of this resistance is taken into account. The women involved in these organizations resisted against discrimination that resulted from the legal changes that

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86 Jang 1983
87 Mumtaz and Shaheed pp 158
Zia made. What Jalal describes here as a reluctance to challenge “prescribed roles in
society,” is a concept that prominent writers of drama serials also describe as a method of
resistance. It is also reminiscent of women who discuss social issues in popular media of the
time, both of which will be discussed in the following chapters.

Fatima Suraiyya Bajjia who presents issues of middle class women in her drama
serials, also comments on the role what she perceives to be feminists. She says, “everywhere
there are people who are victimized. Just seeing this as a female issue does not seem right.
This whole business of a woman being a feminist is...in fact a male conspiracy to push the
woman into a feminist corner in which she is alone.” Drama serials of the time also
comment on the role of women’s activist organizations such as the WAF in the lives of
Pakistani women. Women who actively participated in these organizations were often
portrayed in a negative light.

The widely watched drama serial, Andhera Ujala, (“Darkness and Light”), also
illustrates this view. In one episode, young mother is unable to take care of her home
“sufficiently” and instead spends her time running women’s organizations. After her son
steals a small sum of money from his own house and turns himself into the police. Though
this serial was written by a man and thus demonstrates his point of view on women’s
organizations, even works by women did not portray these organizations in a positive light.

Nurul Huda Shah another prominent drama serial writer, comments on the role that women’s
organizations played in the lives of Pakistani women, saying, “really speaking nothing is
being achieved. Probably urban women are aware of their rights. Otherwise, women’s issues
are being discussed in plush conference rooms, covered by the English language press. What
kind of an impact is that going to have on all those women who toil away in our villages?

89 Bajjia quoted in Kothari pp 59
That is 80% of the country’s women. Who speaks for them?" Here, Shah expresses views about women’s organizations, her comments reminiscent of Jalal’s analysis of them as highly restricted by bounds of class, and therefore unable to appeal to issues relating to all Pakistani women.

While activist women’s organizations attempted to represent women of Pakistan, most of whom came from a rural setting and were uneducated, they also recognized the problems that were created in the process. Perhaps the fact that activist organizations, originated in the upper classes, and thus by their nature, approached women’s issues in with a “patronizing (or matronizing) attitude,” led women of the middle classes to dissociate from these organizations. 

90 Kothari pp 96
91 Shaheed and Mumtaz pp 135
Chapter Four: Power in Purdah and In Media

During the Zia years, Pakistan Television drama serials were most regularly viewed of all television programs. Because they were so widely viewed, these plays displayed potential for social change, not only by those creating them but by those responding to them. It was not until the early 1990s that the popularity of PTV plays decreased, because Dish Antennas were introduced, and those who were able to afford these began to view channels from outside of Pakistan, namely from India, at the same time, Pakistan’s first television network: Network Television Marketing (NTM) was introduced as competition to PTV.92

A study conducted by Nasreen Pervez surveyed the effects of Pakistan Television Plays on its audience. This study consisted of a questionnaire given to two-hundred people in Karachi. Half of the respondents were women and half were men, chosen equally from upper, middle, lower middle, and lower economic classes. The study revealed what kind of television the respondents had been watching and further how this television affected the individuals and their families in areas of consumption of goods, gender roles, and the role of different members of a family in the household.93

Along with gauging the “effects” of television on the respondent’s lives, this study also reveals how many people own television sets and which drama serials they watched most regularly. According to Pervez, a large part of the population owned television sets. Further, collective television viewing was also a common among those who did not own television sets.94 This survey rated the popularity of specific plays and writers. Among low-income males the plays of Amjad Islam Amjad, a writer whose plays focused on issues of class, were most regularly watched. Women overwhelmingly preferred Haseena Moin’s

93 Pervez pp 48
94 Pervez pp 58
serials over others, though both men and women watched these regularly. In my analysis I will be looking at two serials by Moin, one written before and one written during Zia’s Islamization. I will also analyze Waris by Amjad Islam Amjad, and Andhera Ujala, by Younas Javed which was also among the most regularly watched drama serials of that decade.

Pervez’s research also reveals what and how much the audience remembered from drama serials. She noted seventeen concepts that were recalled frequently and “emerged as a reality during their daily routine” four of which were related to women and their traditional roles in society while the rest commented on class issues and poverty. Lower economic classes recalled more “TV drama scenes in their daily life.” One of the most recalled concepts was—the same one reflected in Dr. Israr’s programs—“when you keep a woman ignorant you keep society and future generations ignorant.” The ubiquitous nature of this concept reflects Pakistani women’s perception of its reality and the media’s necessity to propagate this view to both appeal to the public and shape its opinions. Media is made to appeal to the values of its audience, while the values portrayed in media often shape the values of society. Which of these comes first, and to what extent, is a matter still debated in media studies. A woman’s role as a mother was more important than anything else because it is through this role and the proper upbringing of her children, that a woman controlled the future of the country.

There has been little work about media portrayals of women in Pakistani media thus far. One prominent study, a dissertation by Suchi Kothari on the role of Pakistani drama serials providing a space for women to express themselves, analyses the role of three major

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95 Pervez 135
96 Aahat, Pervez 135
drama serial writers and their work. Because she writes about the drama serial as a space for women, she analyses the work of women writers: Suraiyya Fatima Bajjia, Haseena Moin, and Nurul Huda Shah. Each of these three writers takes up different issues in her serials.

Shaheed and Mumtaz argue that drama serials during Zia-ul-Haq’s time portrayed women as “the root cause of all evil.” Zia instated new laws which stated that all women in drama serials should be fully covered. Drama serials aired during Zia-ul-Haq’s period also portrayed women in a mostly covered manner, though not with the full purdah and hijab.

**Waris (Heir) 1979**

*Waris,* which originally aired in 1979 with a series of thirteen episodes, dealt with issues of class and power in feudal society. In the drama, several villages were being evacuated by the government to build a dam. The protagonist, a wealthy feudal lord whose family had owned the land that he lived on for generations, cruelly asserted his authority over the rest of the village. Together, he and his grandson, who shared his love of wealth, committed many crimes (including abducting women) to ultimately find a treasure which rightfully belonged to the government. After finding the treasure, in the process of which one of his grandsons was killed by his brother, and Chaudry is left without an heir for his property. He realized the wrong in the crimes that he had committed. In the end, when the rest of the village was evacuated and the dam built, Chaudry refused to leave his land and was drowned along with his house.

**Andhera Ujala (Darkness and Light) 1984-85**

Andhera Ujala was a drama of law and order, with an independent storyline in each episode.
Many of its episodes were related to issues of women and domesticity and, indirectly, to class. The ideal of women as the creators and upholders of society and so holding immense power in the development of Pakistan as a nation, was a recurring theme in this serial.

**Akas Barle**

One episode depicted two uneducated, rural, young women who were kidnapped and almost sold into prostitution by men who had disputes over land with the families of the two women. As the police team traced the whereabouts of the women, they found that the mother of the two men was behind the abduction. As a mother of two young men—because, as described by Akbar and Ahmed, heaven lay under the feet of the mother and she must be respected to the extent of being feared—she attempted to settle her land disputes by enforcing her authority over her sons. Through her role as their mother, she forced them to seek revenge on the poorer family.

**Rishta**

Another episode of the same series commented in the issue of “eve-teasing” (as the issue of harassment was referred to by Shaheed and Mumtaz). The episode began with two women who filed a report to the police about men who “eve-tease” on the side of the road. These women stormed into the police station and told the officers that they could not do their jobs correctly. The main storyline of this episode revolved around a young woman who was harassed on her way to college. After learning of this, her mother exclaimed, “people like us shouldn’t have daughters.” The man who harassed her then began to call her house to ask to speak with her. After learning of this, her father prevented her from attending college. The episode concluded with the police getting involved and finding the perpetrator, who turned
out to be of a wealthier, more westernized family than that of the girl he is harassing. When the father of this family learned of this, he blamed it on the mother, who had just return from a shopping trip. He immediately told her, “if you could spare time from, shopping, then give some attention to this house.”

**Choti Si Dunya**

The final episode I will be analyzing starts off with a young boy who confesses to the police to stealing 118 Rupees from his home in order to purchase a toy. The boy then explained the details of his relationships with his mother and father. His mother was a gender activist who runs three organizations. After the boy was found in the police station, her husband blamed her, and then the police chief reprimanded both of them but directed most of his instruction to shame the woman. A scene in this drama went back to the mother leaving the child in order to go to her meeting where she was to speak about the importance of mothers spending time with their children to tell her all female audience that every mother and sister is making the future, and that “the fate of tomorrow is in the hands of women.”

**Tanhaiyan (Solitude) 1986**

Haseena Moin’s *Tanhaiyan* told the story of two sisters who were orphaned and had their family home taken away from them in Lahore. They were forced to move to Karachi to live with their aunt. The older sister, Zara, then made it her goal to be able to buy the home back. She worked long and hard, and in the process, her relationship with her sister, her aunt, and her longtime friend and admirer, Zain, suffered. She was finally able to buy the house back,

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but, after going to Lahore and living the reality of the emptiness of the house, she realized that the importance of a home came more from the relationships that were built in it rather than from the building itself. She gets into a car accident which paralyzed her and her fiancé, a millionaire from the United States leaves her, and she was then nursed back to health by her family, and, in the process of which, she realized her love for Zain.

**Parchaiyan (Shadows) 1976**

Compared to *Tanhaiyan*, Moin’s *Parchaiyan*, broadcast in 1976, was more concerned with issues inside the domestic sphere than with women in the workforce. This adaptation of Henry James’ *Portrait of a Lady*, was the story of Najjia, the inheritor of a large sum of her uncle’s wealth, who was wooed by several men. She ended up marrying Shirazuddin through the persuasion of Begum Kishwar, who herself had an illegitimate daughter with him and planned to attain Najjia’s wealth for them both. Najjia then realized that she had always loved her cousin Adil, who had also always secretly loved her but did not profess his love because he had been suffering from a fatal illness. In his last days, Adil and Najjia spend time together and become closer, when Adil dies, she is left heartbroken.

In Moin’s earlier work, the main female character is portrayed as much less assertive and much more oriented around family and relationships. In *Tanhaiyan*, Zara is focused on financial gain and her work, and is a much more active player in the decisions of her life. While Najjia’s decision to marry Shirazuddin is made after she is persuaded by Begum Kishwar, Zara’s engagement to her wealthy boss is a decision almost entirely her own. Though neither relationship ends well, the way in which the choices are made by the characters reflects a shift in attitudes.
This shift in representations of women along with the popularity of these serials indicates a growing support for women in the workplace, but always within “limits.” Bajjia expresses this ideal, “I stay within my limits and do whatever I want to,” she says, when asked why she portrays traditional values in her dramas rather than taking up controversial issues. Kothari asks her about the contradictory quality of this statement and Bajjia replies, “there are always limits and always possibilities.” Her statement is reminiscent of the ways in which women of the middle class both consume and engage with media in order to discuss and resist social issues.

Although Moin disagrees with Bajjia on a number of issues her idea of staying within limits and accomplishing “whatever I want to” is evident throughout Moin’s drama serials. According to Moin, her characters are “strong, smart, chatterboxes, roam all around the world, but they are not badtameez--they are well brought up.” Here, Moin essentially defines the limits of these women as lying within respect of family and relationships. Zara in Tanhaiyan is “well brought up;” she pursues her career and financial goals passionately, but, when she is portrayed as crossing the limits put on her by society, by chasing after wealth, she is punished by paralysis and pulled back into the domestic sphere to be cared for by her family and friends. Although Zara does do what she wants, she, like Bajjia expresses, stays within her limits.

The fact that Moin’s serials are most popular and most regularly watched even among lower classes is notable, considering her serials mostly feature upper class characters. Kothari explains, “she portrays a female world that is only accessible to Pakistani women of the upper classes... Fantasy and escape are two tropes through which she explores the role of

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98 Bajjia quoted in Kothari pp 66
99 Kothari pp 78
women in the public and private sphere. Her characters exist in a community of friends rather than extended family.\textsuperscript{100} The Gah study shows that the place where women hold most of their interactions on a daily basis is limited to extended family and the close neighborhood. However, Moin’s creation of a world in which women, often due to circumstances beyond their control, are forced to become more independent, and work outside of their homes, indicates the growing support of ideals of women in the workplace, but with the ever-present values of family and relationships retaining their importance.

\section*{Drama Serials and “Power”}

Shaheed and Mumtaz also argue that representations of women in television during this time “depicted women as morally loose, in order to justify keeping them under control.”\textsuperscript{101} Rather than creating an image of women as the “root cause of all evil” as Shaheed and Mumtaz contend, these plays in fact portrayed women in three different roles. First, the “westernized” woman, who moved freely in the public sphere, second, the traditional, covered Muslim woman inside of the domestic sphere, and then, between these two, the woman who, although she is educated and knows her rights, and is, to some extent, independent, stays within the limits prescribed to her by society. This character makes her own decisions--with the acceptance and approval of her family and the structure around her.

As Shaheed and Mumtaz point out, one of the first changes that Zia-ul-Haq’s government made was “the use of state controlled media for propagation of fundamentalist views.”\textsuperscript{102} These representations depicted the reality of power structures in which women played prominent roles. When portrayed as the traditional Muslim woman, women were

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\textsuperscript{100} Kothari pp 118  \\
\textsuperscript{101} Shaheed and Mumtaz pp 82  \\
\textsuperscript{102} Shaheed and Mumtaz pp 208
\end{flushright}
depicted as either weak victims of a patriarchal society or were portrayed in roles of absolute power of decision-making over the men in their lives. Even in such portrayals, other issues such as class, age, and setting, always came into play. So while some women may have been depicted as the cause of evil— this depended largely on other factors affecting her—others were portrayed as victims, and others still, as active and independent women. Rather than directly propagating Islamic fundamentalism through media, as Shaheed and Mumtaz suggest, these drama serials portray many other aspects such as socioeconomic status which had a greater effect on women’s lives than legal changes in the form of Islamization.

In Andhera Ujala, the depiction of the interplay between class, gender, and age in relation to power is depicted notably in the form of the mother who sends her sons to abduct the young women in order to seek her own revenge on their families. Other episodes show women in submissive roles victimized by men, but at the same time holding power through the respect that they demand. This “respect” is highly esteemed and also recurs throughout different drama serials.

These drama serials also portrayed a distinct image of a woman and privileged stereotypes about women who were involved in women’s organizations and were active in the workforce or outside of their homes. Women who were assertive and went into the workforce or worked in any way outside of their homes were portrayed as hypocrites, who did not heed to their own advice as illustrated in Andhera Ujala-Choti Si Dunya. The child’s mother was seen as mostly responsible for the son and wholly responsible for the fact that her son has gotten himself into trouble. Near the end of the episode, the police officer spoke to the parents and explained that the future of the country rests in the hands of women, and that

in order to fix anything in society, they must first take responsibility of their own homes and children. Gender activists are portrayed as being hypocritical and having passion only for their activities outside of their home and having no time to take care of their homes and bring up their children “properly.”

In Andhera Ujala- Rishta, as in the previous episode, much of the plot line revolves around women and protecting their “honor” in everything that they do. In this case, leaving the house did not have a stigma attached to it, but being harassed by men did. Conversely, being the mother of a man who harassed women was also portrayed negatively. Husbands blamed their wives for improper upbringing of their children. Women are nevertheless cast as extremely powerful entities where all of society’s problems can potentially be resolved.

The place that “honor” holds in a woman’s life is also explored in Waris. Women in this serial have conflicting “roles” in society. Each woman’s relationships and status are determined very much by her economic and social class. The abduction of women is a theme that recurs throughout the plotline. Near the beginning, Chaudry’s grandson abducts the daughter of a gatekeeper and forcibly marries her to one of his friends. She is then either murdered or commits suicide, which of the two it is unclear, and her father loses his sanity. Before this, a lawyer who once lived in the same village goes back to meet with the father of the abducted woman, encouraging him to file a suit against Chaudry. Hearing of this, Chaudry threatens to also abduct the rest of the women in the gatekeeper’s family, after which he immediately backs away from filing the case.

The abduction of women in this case is an event that sparks much controversy not only because it is the abduction of a person, but that of a woman--the place where the honor

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of the family and the household lies. Scholars have traditionally looked at this and analyzed it as, again, extremely oppressive. Shaheed and Mumtaz note the importance of *izzat* (honor) and add that the woman’s own honor was of “secondary importance” to that of her family. The significance of this case lies in the fact that the woman who is abducted is a lower class woman, the daughter of the gatekeeper. This is juxtaposed with the upper class women of the house who are confined to the *zanaana* (quarters of a home reserved for women) and are also regarded as the “honor” of the family. The manner in which *izzat* is safeguarded, however, varies with not only class but also location and education. Sugra, the daughter-in-law of Chaudry in a rural setting is juxtaposed to the women in the city, who likewise protect their *izzat* but are not confined to the *zannanas* of their homes as the women of the village are. These women attend colleges and universities, run errands, and, if the need arises, also work.\(^{106}\) The educated and urban are portrayed as seeing women’s *izzat* as more flexible and more in the hands of women themselves than the uneducated and the villagers.

Thus the issue became about the way that different classes had the resources and luxury to protect their honor. As Sugra’s husband’s character develops, the importance of education, both of the woman herself and of the men of her family, also becomes evident. Sugra’s husband is the only one of the family who is educated and sees the possibility of women being treated as equal. However, influenced by his grandfather and brother, he too sees his wife as beneath him, and, near the end realizes that he is wrong to do so. Although Sugra, also educated herself, stays faithfully with her husband; only after he changes is she portrayed as being able to live happily and given more responsibility over her *izzat*.\(^{107}\)

\(^{106}\) *Waris*, part 13

\(^{107}\) *Waris*, part 24
This protecting, however was not always about the men of the family protecting the woman as a passive being in need of protection, but also about the way that she herself interacted with anyone outside of her immediate family circle, as not only an individual but as the representative for her whole family. As the Shirkat Gah study assesses, traditions and cultural practices of society affected women’s everyday lives much more than religion, especially in an urban environment. Customs such as the protection of izzat were more about class, location, and economic status than they were about religion. Drama serials made during this time touched on many topics including class and economic issues in the changing landscape of Pakistan--on top of which issues of gender are mapped.

**Social Commentary by the Media in the Words of Three Drama Writers**

Comments of three of the most popular drama writers of the Zia years, illustrate the ways in which these women use their works as a medium for social change, not solely through the works themselves, but also through the audience’s response to them. Haseena Moin, Nurul Huda Shah, and Fatima Suraiyya Bajjia commented on the ways in which their serials acted as a medium for discussion of social issues in which middle class women also actively engaged in interviews conducted and translated by Shuchi Kothari.

Bajjia describes two important aspects of her life, which affect her style, and the subject of her writing. First, she describes the power that the women in her family had, and then she describes the zanana and how women were the most powerful decision-makers inside of the home. Bajjia’s serials are centered around issues of keeping the “household” together and on domestic issues created by the joined family system. According to Kothari,
her serials pay special attention to the role of women in the household and in rituals of the household and the way in which these rituals create power for women.

Shah and Moin, of a younger generation than Bajjia, disagree with her on many points, even though all three writers wrote in a manner which featured social commentary and change, in one way or another. Moin did so indirectly through what she described as “show[ing] the child what is right, not what is wrong,”\textsuperscript{108} while Bajjia claimed to subtly comment on issues of religion. Shah directly challenged the feudal system and gender issues related to that system. Shah says that “the silence that is mark of good breeding in Bajjia’s generation is nothing but cowardice in ours.”\textsuperscript{109} Moin states that “Bajjia lives in the past.”\textsuperscript{110} She says, “one lives within that structure anyway, but as a writer you cannot let that structure limit you, you have to take risks, even if you get beaten. That’s why my women are bold.” She speaks of limits on herself as a writer but also alludes to the limits that her characters are placed in. Moin’s comments about the limits of society are reminiscent of Bajjia’a statements. In Tanhaiyan, Zara explores her limits by working passionately to obtain her family home in Lahore, and in doing so, she crosses traditional boundaries. However, she is then brought back within her limits through the course of events which unfolds. The shift in the values associated with certain concepts, such as speaking, or joining the workforce, as discussed by Bajjia and then by Shah and Moin—represent a shift in values of public opinion during Zia’s era.

Moin’s female characters were strong and independent, and in a comfortable position in society with power and success. She says that her women are counterpoint to those depicted by male writers who show women as miserable victims, crushed by the system and

\textsuperscript{108} Moin in Kothari pp 82
\textsuperscript{109} Shah in Kothari pp 98
\textsuperscript{110} Moin in Kothari pp 75
eternally self-sacrificing, nurturing and serving their husbands. Moin explains that Zia loved her plays because she does not use a harsh voice to address issues, and even when she does, people take her plays lightly. Moin’s women characters are unlike any other portrayals of women during Zia’s time. When asked whether her strong characters are criticized, she explains that although these women are strong and do what they want to, they are brought up well to hold traditional values of respect for elders and parents—they are not badtameez.

Here, two opposite roles that women are most often portrayed in are negotiated. On one end the “westernized” woman who ran feminist organizations and, according to popular portrayals, did not have time for her children and her homes, and on the other, was the traditional role that women had been holding of the passive wife, daughter, and mother. Moin’s characters represented a middle ground where these extremes are negotiated. All three writers argue that Islam gives women fair and equal status to men. Moin and Bajjia argue that it is people who interpret these texts, the mullahs, who corrupt them and so repress women and create the state that they are in today.

Bajjia explains that the dress code changes for actresses made by Zia only affected her serials to a certain extent where when one of the actresses who would be wearing sleeveless met with Zia, he, according to Bajjia “very politely requested the actress to add sleeves to her blouse.”

Bajjia’s attitude towards the changes in dress code made by Zia is one of acceptance. Though she, like Moin and Shah, believes that Islam offers woman a status equal to men, she accepts the fact men ordained that women’s dress code. It is evident from the works of these three writers that even when they commented on social issues for the purposes of social change, they did so within the limits prescribed to them by society.

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111 Moin in Kothari pp 76
112 Moin in Kothari pp 78
113 Bajjia in Kothari pp 70
Debating Female Power in Print Media

Commentaries on gender issues appeared regularly in one of the most widely read news sources in the country during Zia’s dictatorship, Jang, part of the larger media outlet “The Jang Group” founded in 1939 by Mir Khalil-ul-Rehman. Articles and features such as these, as well as letters to the editor reveal public reaction to legal changes that Zia made to the form of government and his imposition of Islamic Law. Articles written by women commenting on social issues showed resistance to social standards from within the domestic sphere in an atmosphere created by two conflicting ideologies—those of the fundamentalists and of women’s organizations such as the WAF. In a time when censorship of the press was one of the most important forms of control practiced by the government, pieces written by women commenting on social issues show signs of resistance by the middle class. Support for women’s organizations, however, was largely absent, while the voice of the “fundamentalist woman” was heard increasingly. Jang was independently owned and Rehman took pride in ensuring that the free press would work for the people in keeping the Pakistani government in check.114 However, Jang appealed to a middle class audience, the same group that Zia appealed to in his Islamization campaign. As such, the view of Islam that Jang propagated was directed at the middle class, and, aligned more closely with the government, than with the contrasting ideology of women’s organizations of the time.

One particularly revealing lightening rod for debates about gender was Fatima Jinnah, one of Pakistan’s most influential personalities. She played a vital role in the creation of Pakistan, and, in her formation of the Women’s Relief Committee lay the foundation for what would become Pakistan’s oldest women’s organization, the All Pakistan Women’s

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114 Aziz
Association. In 1965, the Combined Opposition Parties against Ayub Khan nominated her for presidential candidate.115

Jinnah supported her brother, Muhammad Ali Jinnah, in his struggle to obtain independence from the British Raj as a Muslim-majority state of Pakistan. In 1976 writers in Jang describe her as providing tireless support for him, even when there was political conflict. Articles commemorating Jinnah appear in Jang repeatedly both before and during Zia’s Islamization. “When she spoke, she created patience, drive, passion, and nationalism in a time when there was little of it,” they write.116 As “Madhr-e-Millat” or “Mother of the Nation,” she supported her brother as he actively fought for the creation of Pakistan. Her role in the creation of the Women’s Relief Committee, as well as in the creation of refugee camps and centers for widows and orphans in response to the chaos, which marked Pakistan’s independence, is also described. The aspects of Jinnah’s life that are emphasized most are those that fit into the traditional role of the Pakistani woman as portrayed in both the drama serials and Dr. Israr’s programs even before Islamization.

Her role as a supportive figure is more exaggerated in another tribute to her written in 1982. A chronology of major events of her life gives exact dates of when she began to live in her brother’s home to support him when his health was ailing but does not mention her nomination for president, or describe her role in the creation of the Women’s Relief Committee.117 The portrayal of Jinnah in newspapers is representative of the dominant gender ideology that was being portrayed in media texts particularly aimed at the middle class. While Shaheed and Mumtaz analyzed the work of the WAF and other women’s organizations in a light that suggested that only women who were in the workplace and

115 Ali 43
outside of their homes fighting for their rights on the streets should represent Pakistani women, *Jang* and other popular media propelled a vision almost opposite of this as seen in the portrayal of Fatima Jinnah.

Instead of focusing on the economic or political power that Fatima Jinnah had in her lifetime, *The Jang* focuses on commemorating her importance and power as a supporter of her brother and upholder of values such as nationalism in the people of Pakistan after the death of her brother. By referring to her as “madre-i-millat,” the paper emphasizes her role in creating nationalism and pride in the people. This image is reminiscent of the role that the mother is supposed to have played in *Andhera Ujala*, stopping her son from stealing and raising him in the proper way in order to shape the future of Pakistan.

Two conflicting images of women were created both in drama serials and in print media. One image promoted the view of women as belonging in the house and, through their role as mothers, having the power to shape society. The other, mostly portrayed negatively in popular media was an image of an active feminist, seeking power outside of the domestic sphere.

English language newspapers, such as *Dawn* were giving much more attention than *Jang* to women’s movements during the time. In 1981, a debate was launched in *Dawn* by an article about the status of women. Rayhana Firdaus, a female Islamic scholar, argued that “in the eyes of God and in the eyes of the Quran the personality and status of women in Muslim Society are exactly the same as those of man.”118

These articles comment on prominent social issues that women of the middle class faced in the domestic sphere. While they asked for social change against structures created by society, they also stayed within their limits. As such, these women commented mostly on

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118 Firdaus in Muntaz and Shaheed pp 72
issues of domesticity as related to the middle class—completely different from issues effecting upper and lower classes.

The parallel fundamentalist perspective that women held was also present in the commentary of middle class women in Jang. “The purpose of purdah is being defeated,” one woman writes in her observation of the role of purdah in March 1980. “Today women wear burkah but do not cover their hair, women are covering their heads with a chiffon dupatta that barely covers their hair,” she says as she details how a woman should properly wear purdah in public. “When there is no ihtaram (manners) left for woman, how can she be respected?” she concludes, summing up her purpose in writing the piece and providing firm ideological support for the government’s move to enforce purdah.119

Major media representations during this time fit women into a model of either the ‘westernized’ woman who actively protests for her rights, or of the traditional Pakistani woman as a victim of a patriarchal society. Here, we see the portrayal of the woman as meant to stay within the role prescribed to her as the mother and supporter. On the other end, letters sent into the paper by readers, show their thoughts on issues affecting women within the “limits” of in the domestic sphere and the middle class.

Shaheed and Mumtaz argue that media played a vital role in the development and success of the WAF. They argue that “any resistance to government initiatives was newsworthy, and in the prevailing circumstances the women’s resistance spearheaded by WAF made headlines. WAF therefore depended to a large extent on press support for the

success of any given campaign.”

The support for women’s organizations that Shaheed and Mumtaz speak of, however, was largely limited to the English language press, such as the long-established, *Dawn News* and the English daily, *The Muslim*, whose main audience was the upper class who could afford to send their children to high-end schools where English was taught. Media whose audience was the Urdu-speaking middle and lower-middle classes, such as the daily *Jang*, did not show this support for women’s organizations. *Jang’s* coverage of protests of February 12, 1983, the “turning point” in the development of the WAF, created an image of protests as unnecessary and blasphemous against the Quran and Islam. The headline read: “Nothing that Challenges Quranic Law Should be Supported.”

The event was then described as women protesting *The Law of Evidence* and being confronted by the police, ending in the arrest of 30. The article then reported reactions, most of which stated that any protest against Islamic Law should not be supported. Regret was expressed, however, that these women were hurt and arrested. “Women should not have been disrespected in such a way,” said Maulana Maududi’s son, Haidar Maududi. While another *alam* comments that these protests, and so the WAF, are *maghrib-zada* (influenced by the west) and should not be supported.

### Power and Purdah vs Power and Images

In his book *Purdah and the Status of Women in Islam*, which sold many copies in Pakistan and the rest of the Muslim world, Maududi analyzed reasons why Muslim women

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were becoming more “westernized” and why they were taking off their veils and leaving their homes to pursue “activities shoulder to shoulder with men.” According to him, Muslims had an emotional response when Europeans said that Muslim women were oppressed some groups expressed these sentiments openly and others did so subconsciously, while both groups concealed their “real motives” with rational arguments borrowed from the west such as health care and education for women. The real motive, he argued, was “directing the womenfolk to follow in the patterns of western women and mould them into patterns prevalent in the west.”

According to him women have been degraded throughout history because no society has ever truly followed Islamic laws regarding women’s rights. He also explains that women have been allowed a place of respect in an Islamic society that they will never have in any other. This them of the value of respect for women was seen repeatedly both in PTV drama serials of the time (the woman who is threatened on her way to college) and in print media (people’s reactions to the WAF protests).

One of the most notable changes made under Zia were directives regarding the appearance of women in media, a campaign to prevent obscenity and pornography. According to new directives, which were officially implemented in 1982 but had been promoted indirectly since Islamization was first implemented, women had to be fully covered when appearing on television and could not appear in any television advertisement that was not related to women or women’s work in order to ensure that ‘no attempt is made to exploit the fair sex for commercial purposes.’ Mumtaz and Shaheed argue “while there is no doubt that the problem of obscenity is valid in itself, the issue, as defined by the government, seemed to equate women per se with obscenity.”

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123 Mumtaz and Shaheed pp 81
with obscenity and more with “projecting a particular image of women, defined by sewing machines, detergents, and other items of housework.”

Representations of women in images in Jang, however, did not adhere to the dress codes that were implemented for women in televised media. Although these laws were intended to include the press, images of women were far from disappearing. In the years before Islamization, images of women in advertisements of films were littered across newspapers, one of the main attractions for selling the paper. Large full page colored photographs of actresses were featured as supplements. These were graphic and even vulgar images of women, depicted mostly in film advertisements wearing low necklines and skin-tight clothing. As Zia passed laws regarding the dress code of women, these advertisements, though they became smaller in size, continued to appear. While the numbers of ads selling films decreased, those selling household and personal products increased.

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124 Mumtaz and Shaheed pp 82
Conclusion: The Voice of the Middle Class Woman

Kothari argues “television’s domestic address and viewing context intensifies and complicates the relationship between the public and the private.” She explains that television serials written during the 1980s and 90s were mostly about issues in women’s lives, written by women, and viewed by a large female audience. She argues, “Urdu serials open up discursive sites where women resist, transgress, and negotiate their prescribed limits in an Islamist patriarchal society.” As Fatima Suraiyya Bajjia, Haseena Moin, and Nurul Huda Shah explained, each writer had a positive relationship with the government and with PTV. Thus, their resistance also remained within limits, but actively on social issues that women are affected by.

In letters to the editor, however, the way in which women of the middle class write about social issues created a conversation between the more “Islamic” ideology of the editors and middle class women’s response to societal issues. As already discussed, Jang published articles portraying women in a domestic light, rather than in the role of activist. Shaheed argues that for the majority of women family was the location of identity, social action, and support. She also says that the family was not just about control and identity but also where “joys and sorrows are shared” and where the majority of interactions took place. She also says that the extended family and the neighborhood is the extent of female mobility and social interaction. Thus the women who write drama serials focus on these issues rather than on the issues that women’s organizations of the time respond to.

Along with features portraying women in the role of mother, daughter and supporter, the audience’s participation through letters to the editor, which had always been present,

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126 Kothari
127 Shaheed 2002, pp 355
began to discuss women’s issues inside the domestic sphere more often and more prominently. These did not directly comment on issues of equality and legal justice brought to the forefront by Islamization, but were related to the role of women in society as it existed in that time. They also did not call for changes like those proposed by WAF whose activities were mainly focused on countering Islamization, but commented on the necessity for change within the domestic sphere. One woman letter writer commented on the problems that come along with arranged marriages in a commentary sent into the Jang.\textsuperscript{128} She discussed the tradition in which the parents of the groom-to-be who go to \textit{pasand} or ‘like’ the potential bride before an arranged marriage. She expressed concern at the increasing rate at which these parents were making criticisms that were superficial and baseless. She said that families of males were becoming more critical of girls in superficial ways. She gives examples such as “her features are nice, but her color is too dark” or that “she is attractive but she walks crooked.” All of this is said, she says, because they are confident of the fact that parents of boys can get away with anything. The woman writing this article was commenting on the social implications of issues, and on the way that traditions such as this negatively affected society. Another letter writer commented on \textit{Tallaq} or divorce and the taboo that was associated with it.\textsuperscript{129} She discusses the issue and writes that divorce should be accepted more openly by society at large, especially when the woman is suffering from an unhappy marriage.

Though active commentary on issues that directly affected was common, these commentaries also led to social change. Dramas written by Fatima Suraiyya Bajjia, directed towards and mostly watched by, women of the middle class, commented on the role of


women in an Islamic society as interpreted by Bajjia. According to Bajjia, interpreters of Islam during Zia’s years did not properly understand Islam.” Instead, she proposed a liberal interpretation of Islam, which she promoted through her drama serials. She says,

“In my serial Uroosa, I devote an entire episode on the nikah. In General Ayub Khan’s time, the Muslim Family Laws Ordinance provided us with a standardized nikah-naama (marriage contract) which includes: the woman’s right to divorce, the woman’s right to inherit her husband’s property, the woman’s rights to keep the wedding gifts and the mehr (dower) money and so on. People pay off the qazi (Islamic Cleric) to either scratch out clauses or draw a contract so that women are rendered helpless. Why shouldn’t a woman know the rights given to her by the government of Pakistan in consonance with Islamic laws? In the serial I had the actor read the whole nikahnaama (marriage contract), the longer version so that the audience would know their rights. Oh, I got so many complimentary letters. Some people even apologized for marrying their daughters off in a hurry.”

The response to this scene in the form of letters written to magazines and newspapers is further explored by Kothari. While some men and women labeled such commentary on issues as blasphemous because it went against orthodox interpretations of Islamic law, many supported Bajjia in her portrayal of the issue of mehr. One woman praises Bajjia for bringing up this issue in her drama serial, “Obviously since the girl’s parents cannot insist on the payment, the Qazi should explain these rights to the girl.” Kothari explains that the result of this debate was “a volley of congratulatory letters, mostly written by parents of girls, which appreciated Bajjia for bringing to their notice something they might have neglected while marrying off their daughters in a hurry. Bajjia proudly informed me that the government was forced to issue a notice that decreed tampering with a nikah-naama issued by the registrar’s office to be a felony.” One sees here the interplay of television and print media and their potential to prompt social change by women. Bajjia, a woman who dissociates herself from activists like Shaheed and Mumtaz, and has a middle class

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130 Bajjia in Kothari pp 61
131 Bajjia in Kothari pp 170
132 Bajjia in Kothari pp 169
133 Bajjia in Kothari pp 170
background, comments on issues of *mehr* in marriage, which, because it varies so much between different Muslim countries and even within a single country, is more traditional or cultural than religious in nature. Further, these issues are then taken up by middle class women whose response leads to governmental action on this social issue.

Unlike the helpless victims of patriarchal society that these women are portrayed as in popular western media, the comments that these women made about their own positions in society, through analysis of media of the time, indicates that they were in fact well aware of the way that they lived and of the forces that affected them. Even these societal problems and their reactions were limited to the middle class. Concerns of lower classes are rarely documented and when they are, concerns that often have little to do with religion are painted as issues created by Islam. While changes in law created an atmosphere which allowed women to be persecuted in cases of rape, many other factors had an effect on the way that these cases played out. Thus, persecution of women under Islamic laws had much more to do with literacy levels, class, and location than it did with the enforcement of the laws themselves. Most cases of persecution of women in fact took place in villages among feudal societies where there was not enforcement of the laws created by Islamization, as indicated by Naveed-i-Rahat’s study. Thus, only by understanding which forces—religion, literacy levels, economic class, or location—truly affected women and how these women themselves reacted, can one truly understand the nature of oppression of women.
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