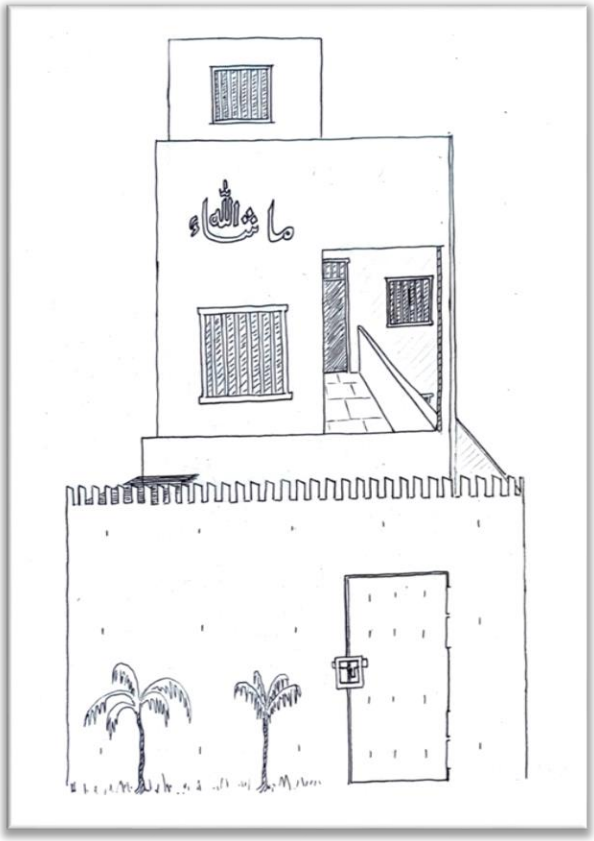
“Girls should be ready for anything”: time, learning and aspiration among hostel girls in Lahore



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Abstract

This thesis explores the lives of a group of young, middle-class women living in a privately-run girls' hostel in Lahore. The key question that this thesis seeks to address is the meaning of this stage in the lives of young women. A temporary period of accommodation in an urban hostel while studying is increasingly conceptualised as part of the life course for middle-class young women, bracketed by childhood in the natal household and married, virilocal adulthood. What does it mean to move to the city alone as a young Pakistani woman, and how do these women understand the experience of being a 'hostellite'?

Based on nearly nine months of close-range participant observation, I tell the stories of some of the women who lived alongside me in the hostel. I describe how the journeys they make from rural areas to the city become conceptualised as journeys from asynchronous cultural 'backwardness' to a distinctively gendered and classed modernity, embodied in bodily techniques, cultural competencies and practices of consumption. Against global narratives celebrating the liberatory potential of education and work for supposedly constrained and oppressed Muslim women in the Global South, my thesis shows the pressure placed upon these subjects in the process of becoming groomed, as they experience hardship, humiliation and loneliness and learn to cultivate endurance (*bardasht*) and patience (*sabr*) as key attributes of hostellite life.

In this thesis I reflect critically upon the ethical and methodological decisions that have influenced my research practice, particularly in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic. I seek to show how these issues have influenced my research and writing, and how questions of absence, incompleteness and ethical refusal have shaped my thesis.

Notes on use of language and transliteration

Urdu, the state language of Pakistan, was the main language used within the fieldsite of Fahmida Hostel. The rural and middle-class backgrounds of the hostel residents meant that a good number had received an English-medium education, although, unlike more elite Pakistani citizens, few spoke English outside of a formalised classroom setting. Instead, reflecting the linguistic diversity of Pakistan, most of my fellow hostel residents spoke different languages such as Punjabi, Seraiki, Pashto and Dari as their mother tongues and within their families and communities of birth. Within the urban space of the hostel, where residents of different linguistic backgrounds came together, Urdu was primarily spoken and served as a *lingua franca*. During my fieldwork I spoke mainly in Urdu with hostel residents, with some use of Punjabi, and I learned to understand but not speak Seraiki.

For ease of reading, I present dialogue excerpts from my fieldwork translated into English, although I retain some Urdu words and phrases in order to convey meanings that might escape translation and to allow the reader to understand the words or phrases originally used. Where I present Urdu words and phrases I use italicised script and follow with a bracketed English translation. I avoid the use of diacritic and vowel signs in transliterating Urdu into Roman script. While such conventions support the oral pronunciation of words unfamiliar to non-Urdu speakers, they did not form part of the writing or reading practices of any of my interlocutors in Lahore, many of whom frequently composed text messages, emails and social media posts in Romanised Urdu. In order to render my own patterns of transliteration accessible to my interlocutors, I follow the everyday transliteration practices that they themselves used.

Like Liechty's informants in Nepal (2003), hostel girls often peppered their conversations with English words and phrases, suggesting not only the extent to which English language is viewed as an aspirational attribute in Pakistan (Manan 2021) but the existence of 'new epistemological codes…that are simultaneously acknowledged as foreign…and local' (Liechty 2003: xiv). To convey the richness of these practices of code-switching, I indicate English terms used within Urdu or Punjabi speech by enclosing them within asterisks.

Introduction

This thesis explores a distinctive location in the lives of thousands of women living in Pakistani cities - the space of the urban hostel, a dormitory-style institution in which migrant women may spend some months or years living while studying or working in an urban centre. My research was based in a privately-run hostel, which I call Fahmida Girls Hostel, in a district towards the outskirts of Lahore. Between August 2019 and March 2020, while I was a resident, Fahmida Hostel also hosted up to thirty-four other women at any time. Most of the residents were rural-origin, middle-class students who had migrated to Lahore for education in a mixture of public and private institutions. Some were students enrolled at the University of the Punjab, one of the oldest public universities in Lahore; others were taking vocational courses at some of the modern, private institutions that have sprung up since the deregulation and privatisation of the educational sector in Pakistan since the 1980s (Ali & Tahir 2009; Ali 2013; Donn & al Manthri 2013). A smaller minority of residents were described as 'working women', employed as doctors, telesales workers serving foreign markets and white-collar office workers in industry; most of these women had begun as students and had transitioned to the status of working women after completing their studies. Based on nearly nine months of participant observation among this changing population of migrant women, this thesis explores the following questions: what does it mean for a young Pakistani woman to move alone to the city and take up residence in a hostel setting? What are these women's experiences of hostel life, and what does it mean to become a 'hostel girl' or 'hostellite'? And finally, what does the period of being a hostellite mean in the broader context of their class identities and life trajectories?

The key intervention that this thesis makes is in its close focus on the time-space of the hostel as a discrete stage in the life trajectories of hostel girls. Hostels are single-sex, communal boarding-house accommodation, typically overseen by a warden, and records of the first hostels date to the nineteenth century in British-ruled India, where they operated as residential institutions within the colonial educational and administrative structure (Krishnan 2017; Grewal 1996; Bruce 1933; Leitner 1884; Arora 2014). Hostels have been approached as sites of carcerality, concerned with gendered regulation and control (Pothukuchi 2001; Krishnan 2019b; Melkote & Tharu 1983), and in contemporary India, a vibrant feminist movement has come together in the last five years around the authoritarianism and sexism experienced in women's hostels (Roy 2016; Zahan 2020; Gupta 2020). Despite a contemporaneous feminist movement in Pakistan, however, hostels do not seem to have become the focus of a similar level of activism. For women ambitious to access education and career success in urban Pakistan, hostels offer one of the few viable options for achieving their aspirations. The urban concentration of educational institutions means that women living in the rural hinterlands have few opportunities to engage in learning within their local areas; in addition, gendered patterns of spatial domination in Pakistan, including the continuing importance of *purdah* or gendered segregation (Papanek & Minault 1982; Mandelbaum 1988) structure women's access to public space and make living outside the domestic sphere logistically difficult. Increasing expectations for women's education, however, mean that a period of residence within a hostel setting is becoming more accepted as a stage of a middle-class woman's life. Girls in the hostel that I lived in were among the first in their extended families to live away from home, and some had been followed by younger sisters and cousins for whom they had opened a path. In addition, the burgeoning

nature of privatised education in Pakistan and the consequent increase in student numbers have made running hostels a meaningful source of income in urban Pakistan.

Rather than a long-term ethnographic study that follows the development of individual life-courses over multiple years, I concentrate explicitly on the time-space of the hostel itself, providing a description of a particular moment within women's lives. In part, this is related to the peculiar conditions of my fieldwork experience, which was cut short prematurely in 2020 by the Covid-19 pandemic. However, my decision to focus entirely on the hostel was not solely due to exigency, but because of my sense of the hostel as a highly liminal space. As an intervening phase in rites of passage that transition individuals from one life stage to another, liminality has often been approached as a period of symbolic role reversal (Turner 1997; Gennep et al. 2004), but is also studied as a quality of space, manifested in non-places of airports, railway stations and other interstitial geographic locations (Augé 2008; Hall 2015).

Hostels strike me as liminal spaces for several reasons. Residence therein is always conceptualised as temporary; there is no expectation that a hostel could act as a long-term or permanent home. They also possess qualities of both private and public space, since access is restricted to residents but residents themselves are generally strangers to each other. The main way in which I conceptualise the hostel as a liminal space, however, is in the space it offers for preparation and learning for the future. Hostel residence was understood as a distinct stage within the life-course of residents, intervening between childhood and married, virilocal adulthood. In the hostel, women learn to live alongside strangers, manage bodily and interpersonal boundaries and endure degradation and insults with dignity; these are considered essential skills for anticipated futures as married women, living with husbands and in-laws, maintaining careers and bearing responsibility for homes, children and families.

In order to avoid a totalising depiction of young women as victims, it is essential to note that there were pleasures in hostel life. As this thesis will show, hostel residence was in part characterised by increased autonomy over mobility, greater access to consumption, exposure to urbanity and the ability to imagine educational and career success. However, hostel life was also characterised by trials and difficulty, stemming from a marketised logic of rent extraction and financial exploitation as well as from the construction of young women as immature subjects in need of control. These trials meant that hostels were not considered incidental or arbitrary locations for the development of endurance, forbearance and patience, but as sites uniquely suited to the inculcation of these abilities. In this thesis, therefore, I approach the hostel as a distinct location in time and space, wherein residents reflect on the past, anticipate the future and work to endure a slow and sometimes painful existence in the present.

By envisioning hostels as spaces of learning, I follow Lave and Wenger (1991) in viewing learning as occurring within communities of practice, rather than exclusively through hierarchical institutions. While many of the young women living in urban hostels are attending colleges and universities in order to acquire recognised qualifications, focusing on the space of the hostel demonstrates how learning involves communal experience and praxis beyond a formally-transmitted curriculum. Within the confines of the hostel, hostel girls learn how to share space, perform a gendered and classed indifference to sexual harassment and to portray themselves as stylishly modern, 'groomed' feminine subjects. Rather than conceptualising communities of learning as harmonious and cooperative, however, I stress the hierarchies and suspicion that intersect communities of learners, arguing that much of the learning that hostel girls do takes place within an atmosphere of widespread mistrust. Attending to the ambitions, motivations and fears of women living in

hostels nuances the simplistic opposition between conformity and resistance that is often imposed onto interpretations of women's agential actions. Saba Mahmood (2005) criticises the academic tendency to understand Muslim women as either dominated by or rebels against patriarchy, arguing that such readings elide pious women's own affective relationship to sociality and religiosity. Similarly, Manata Hashemi (2020) notes that while Iranian youth are often depicted as oppositional and defiant, many low-income youth are seeking to conform as part of a struggle to obtain dignity. As I describe hostel girls in their practices of becoming educated, urbane and groomed, I aim to show how hostel life entails criticism, acceptance and self-cultivation as part of the process of subjectivation as modern young women (Shroff 2020).

Hostel girls' locations in terms of social class and life-trajectory

One of the key bodies of literature with which this thesis is in conversation is the wider literature on middle-class identities (Dickey 2012; Donner 2011; Liechty 2003; Heiman et al. 2012; Baviskar & Ray 2011; Fernandes 2000; Freeman 2014). Hostel girls' financial ability to access higher education, combined with their white-collar career aspirations and affective attachment to the idea of education itself, recall key characterisations of the middle class as education-focused (Lukose 2009; Liechty 2003; Fuller & Narasimhan 2007) and globally aspirational (Brosius 2010; Ghertner 2011; Haines & Ghertner 2011). Two observations need to be made in relation to the description of hostel girls as middle-class, however. First, it is important to note that the hostel I lived in was one of thousands across Lahore, and that its inhabitants were only a small sub-section of a larger and very diverse population of hostel residents. During my period of fieldwork in Lahore, I met young people from extremely wealthy, upper- and upper-middle class families who lived in hostels at elite institutions like

the Lahore University of Management Sciences (LUMS); I also met middle-class women working in professional, white-collar jobs, who lived in privately-run hostels, and working-class women employed in low-paid service jobs, who lived in government-run hostels with the most basic of amenities. Although these disparate populations may all be described accurately as hostel residents, there is clearly significant diversity in wealth, background and experiences across this category. Second, what it means to be middle-class is cross-culturally specific. Maqsood (2017) identifies two distinct cultures of middle-classness, the old and the new, in Lahore, while Brosius (2010) shows that middle-classness in India often connotes quite extreme wealth and privilege. In contrast to the classification of fairly elite families as middle-class in India, the middle-class identities of women living in the hostel I studied bore much greater similarity to the 'squeezed middle' of unstable financial security and anxious performance of class identity that Dickey (2016) and Gilbertson (2018) describe. Given this complexity, it is necessary to give a specific description of the women that I counted as my friends, co-residents and interlocutors.

Pierre Bourdieu's concept of capital helps me to understand my interlocutors within the hostel as members of the Pakistani middle classes. Defining capital as a 'set of actually useable resources and powers' (2015:108), Bourdieu identifies distinct three fields of capital - economic, social and cultural - each of which manifests in distinct ways in the differentiation of social class. Economically, the women living in the hostel that I studied were by no means from the poorest sections of Pakistani society. They were able to access discretionary education and participate to some extent in consumption as a leisure practice. Furthermore, most had received, to some extent, an English–medium education in a society where this is a highly aspirational marker of success (Rahman 2005; Manan 2021). However, they were not of elite wealth. Most girls combined their studies with low-paid,

part-time jobs with little security, often in telesales centres, or were dependent for income on hard-earned financial support from their families that was received with gratitude, guilt and a sense of deep obligation. Anxieties about income, expenditure and the ability to manage finances characterised many girls' experiences of hostel life and added a critical edge to their resentful sense of financial exploitation within the hostel. Combined with the financial pressure of rental extraction, hostel girls also experienced a pressure to consume in order to present themselves as successful, middle-class women, using a cultural idiom of being 'groomed' to describe the way in which class manifested through physical and sartorial appearance (Gilbertson 2018; Dickey 2016; Frøystad 2006). Finally, girls' social backgrounds also helped to locate them in terms of class. Girls living in Fahmida Hostel were generally from provincial areas which were considered culturally asynchronous and 'backward' in comparison to the sophistication of the city. While girls were affluent enough to be able to pursue higher education, their rural origins, manner of speech, clothing and lack of habituation to urban environments meant that they were read as less securely middle-class than either longstanding urban residents, or those whose migration to the city had occurred within the last couple of generations (Maqsood 2017). In contrast to either the old or new middle classes described by Maqsood in Lahore, hostel girls were conscious of a precarious relationship to class privilege that could easily crumble.

The interrelation of class, gender, race and other aspects of identity means that hostel girls' experience of middle-classness cannot be understood in an agendered way. Literature from across South Asia show that middle-class women face highly gendered expectations that include, but are not limited to, embodying a conventionally attractive and heteronormative femininity (Phadke 2017; Frøystad 2006; Brosius 2010), maintaining idealised domesticity alongside paid work (Radhakrishnan 2009; Donner 2011), combining

financial astuteness with skilful consumption (Liechty 2003; Dickey 2012; Gilbertson 2018) and differentiating the self from immoral elite and working-class others by performing a carefully-calibrated morality (Phadke et al. 2011; Krishnan 2022; Shroff 2020). Much of the literature on middle-class femininity has focused on women who are considered developmentally mature, either because of married status and parenthood (Hussein 2017; Donner 2011; Radhakrishnan 2009), or because of working and professional identities (Khurshid 2017; Khurshid & Leyava 2019). Although being unmarried is often taken as a sign of juvenility, Khurshid's study of educated women in Pakistan notes that women feel themselves to be more respected and taken more seriously as adults and decision-makers within their families as a result of their education and employment, regardless of unmarried identities. Although this literature provides multiple helpful insights into manifestations of gendered and classed forms of respectability in South Asia, a potential, and incorrect, assumption might be that these concerns with performing respectability are only salient to women considered socially adult.

One of the contributions that this thesis aims to make, therefore, is in showing how hostel girls, young women seen as immature girl-children, live out classed and gendered identities in relation to a distinctive life-stage. Following Liechty's (2003) recognition of the relationship between youth cultures in Nepal and aspirations towards middle-classness, and Shenila Khoja-Moolji's (2017) identification of the idealised 'Muslim Girl' in Pakistan, I argue that hostel girls experienced particular kinds of gendered and classed pressures precisely because they were conceptualised as immature girl-children (Lal 2013). Women living in the hostel were typically aged between seventeen and twenty-five, although some were older, and were generally enrolled at university or working. Despite these claims to maturity, however, hostel residents were almost invariably described as girl-children

(*bachhe*), daughters (*betiyan)*, 'hostel-girls' or 'hostellites,' relating not only to the emic understanding of these young women as immature and vulnerable recipients of care, but to the implied sense of futurity and incompleteness that characterised their lives. As imagined bearers of the future (Harris 2004), hostel girls were charged with the need to develop particular classed and gendered behaviours, such as the skill of self-beautification, the ability to compromise and forbear, and a sturdy self-reliance that would not be let down by others. Throughout this thesis, I intentionally use the term 'girl' or 'hostel girl' to emphasise the extent to which hostel girls' experiences were lived in relation to an anticipated future of social adulthood and maturity.

Anthropological hero-narratives

Explaining how this thesis came about reminds me of the early months of the Covid-19 lockdown in the UK, in March and April 2020, when I felt an urge to reread the introductions to some of my favourite ethnographies. I was fascinated by how anthropologists had arrived in their field sites and had come to their research questions. Some of these accounts, like Malinowski's seminal line - 'Imagine yourself suddenly set down surrounded by all your gear, alone on a tropical beach close to a native village, while the launch or dinghy which has brought you sails away out of sight' (Malinowski 1922:3) - have helped to establish the conventions of the genre of an heroic anthropologist setting out alone to discover something new (Stocking 1983). In others, messy and discouraging beginnings are presented as the basis for a generative shift in understanding, which eventually allowed an anthropologist to come to a deeper knowledge of their field site. For example, Nayanika Mathur (2016) describes how the initial discouragement she received in her attempts to find a field site for the study of Indian bureaucracy, as she was told repeatedly that she would 'find nothing here', helped her to grasp how the power of

government was conceptualised as always elsewhere. Laura Ring (2006) also describes how her initial frustration at women's conversations about family life, marriage, beauty and chores, when she wanted to research questions of violence and ethnicity in Karachi, transformed when she began to understand these apparently mundane interests as related to the gendered maintenance of everyday peace. I began to think of these accounts as something like anthropological origin myths, stories of an intellectual hero's journey (Campbell et al. 1990) that traced a transformation from ignorance to wisdom.

These origin narratives felt pertinent to me because of my own preoccupation at the time with the indefinite suspension of my doctoral fieldwork in Pakistan. I had started fieldwork in August 2019 with the intention of researching gendered experiences of urban infrastructural transformation in Lahore, the second-largest city in Pakistan and one that was undergoing significant infrastructural changes due to the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). Having noted, in earlier visits to Pakistan, the way that 'smart' transport options seemed to be radically altering middle-class women's access to the city, I was intrigued by how these corporate and technocratic models of progress might affect different citizens' experiences of the city. The co-location of a vibrant feminist movement centring on gendered access to public space, as well as the visceral impact of the climate crisis lending urgency to decisions about what future lay ahead for the city, convinced me that I would have no difficulty over my planned eighteen months of fieldwork in gathering a rich body of data upon which to base an interesting doctoral thesis.

In order to study more closely the gendered experience of urban infrastructural change, I decided to base myself in a women's hostel in outer Lahore. A contact in Oxford put me in touch with Miss Nazia, an outwardly charming woman who ran Fahmida Girls' Hostel in a district of Lahore that I call Amber Town. Fahmida Hostel was very close to several

transport hubs, including the still-under construction mass transit system known as the Orange Line, and housed around thirty rural-origin middle-class women. Urban, dormitory-accommodation hostels have been part of the urban environment in South Asia since the late nineteenth century (Bruce 1933; Krishnan 2017), offering single-sex accommodation to students, migrants and workers in large cities. While no formal measures of the number of hostels exist to my knowledge, I observed hundreds of privately-run hostels in my time in Lahore, and anecdotal information suggested that numbers have grown rapidly in the last couple of decades with the expansion of the privatised education sector in Pakistan. Basing myself in a hostel seemed to me to be a desirable location for exploring how rural-to-urban migrant women experienced the city and made choices about how to traverse it. As a young female researcher, it also struck me as an option that would offer a way around the gender segregation that characterises much of Pakistani social life, while ensuring a degree of personal safety.

I moved into Fahmida Hostel in August 2019 and devised a method of research that involved trips out across Lahore during the day, making connections with different organisations and carrying out observations at a range of sites, but spending evening, weekends and usually a couple of days during the week in the hostel, getting to know the other hostel girls and the rhythm of hostel life. Living within the hostel meant that I found it easy to write down notes of conversations almost as soon as they happened, meaning that many of my records from within the site of the hostel are extremely rich, almost verbatim recollections of speeches and conversations. I often wrote down my records of conversations within the hostel as dialogues between different speakers, using both Urdu and English in my written records. In contrast, my fieldnotes from the organisations and events that I attended outside of the hostel tended to be recorded on the evening of the day they occurred,

meaning that while they were still detailed, they were usually less precise than the notes recorded almost immediately within the hostel.

The Covid-19 pandemic and consequent series of worldwide lockdowns in 2020 radically altered my research plans, as it did for many other researchers. By coincidence I had decided to take a three-week break from fieldwork in March, and had returned home to the UK. While I was still there, a national lockdown was declared, and I soon realised that I could not plan on returning to Lahore in the near future. I had luckily brought my laptop with me, and thus had access to my electronically-recorded fieldnotes, but I had left behind all the paper-based resources, books and documents I had gathered over my time in the field. With no prospect for resuming fieldwork, and with the consciousness of my doctoral funding period ticking by, I decided to begin writing up my thesis with the information that I had available, rather than delay in the hopes of carrying out more fieldwork. As I looked through my fieldnotes, it became clear that the richest and most complete data I had related to the site of the hostel itself. I therefore revisioned the focus of my thesis; instead of an exploration of gendered and classed experiences of the urban environment, I would focus on the small-scale interactions taking place within the four walls of the hostel, and seek to discover what could be learned from that site.

I made this decision with very mixed feelings. Firstly, I was worried that I lacked sufficient data to write authoritatively after a comparatively short period of fieldwork. Second, the small-scale nature of my rescaled plans seemed to me to be decidedly dull, in contrast to the very ambitious, sweeping vision of urban transformation with which I had begun my research period and about which I had hoped to write an exciting thesis. I was concerned that an ethnography written about women's lives would read as dated, or that it would be interpreted within the trope of Muslim women who need saving (Abu-Lughod

2013). More personally, living in the hostel had been a difficult time for me. Against my expectations of a vibrant social hub of young women eager to explore the city and share their experiences, the hostel had been characterised by an atmosphere of caution, suspicion, fear and constant low-level resentment of what the other hostel girls saw Miss Nazia's exploitation of them. Living in such an environment had been emotionally gruelling, and writing about it while living through the existential anxiety of a pandemic felt taxing.

I provide this background as the origin myth to my own ethnography in order to provide an alternative anthropological 'hero's journey', based on a reconceptualization of what it means to know rather than a linear move from ignorance to wisdom. Through the process of writing I began to reconcile myself to the fact that, even if I had fulfilled my intended span of fieldwork, I could not know everything. Indeed, the attempt to do so might be harmful in other ways, by claiming a falsely omniscient overview that obscures what is not known. My relatively short fieldwork period and shift in research focus means that there are clear absences in my work - for example, girls living in the hostel spoke very little about caste, and so I can provide very little concrete data about caste backgrounds, despite their continued significance in Pakistan (Gazdar 2007). However, sometimes these absences are illuminating of other issues, such as the sense I gained over the course of my fieldwork that the reluctance to discuss caste was linked to a perception of its being a concern not suited to an urbane and modern identity. Acknowledging the gaps in my work allows me to resist a hubristic narrative of anthropological omniscience by claiming an authoritative overview. Instead, I advance my own ethics of care as a researcher, choosing to avoid foreclosure by staying with a fine-grained ethnographic description that leaves space for open-endedness and differing interpretations.

My initial concerns about the small-scale nature of my revisioned field site, and what I feared would be an uninteresting thesis, also shifted as I thought more deeply about the lives of the women I had lived alongside in Fahmida Hostel. Their journeys to the city for work and education were monumental in their family histories, and they were often breaking new ground as the first generation of women among their kin groups to live away from home before marriage, to study in higher education and to earn their own livings. While these life transformations could easily be assimilated to a triumphalist narrative about the redemptive power of girls' education, my experiences of living alongside these women gave me a more critical view. The hostel was a site where the effects of neoliberalism, religion, aspiration, education, gender and patriarchy were lived out and experienced. Girls in the hostel were invested with responsibilities towards social reproduction and national success in their predicted personal and professional trajectories. They experienced significant pressure to model an ideal femininity that was simultaneously modern and pious, embodying career success and domestic excellence, and in which they took responsibility for their own safety, wellbeing and achievement. Many of these women had worked extremely hard to conform to challenging metrics of success and had sacrificed leisure, ease and familial care in order to meet the expectations placed on them. At the same time, their anticipated futures were profoundly uncertain, with significant influence anticipated from in-laws, husbands, caring responsibilities and patriarchal norms in the workplace. Many women were aware that despite their efforts, the futures that they had worked so hard for, and which had been held up as promises of secure happiness and recognition, might be unachievable. This tension between aspiration and reality structured the experience of hostel life as a liminal space where various possible futures were imaginable, but the certainty of any one was not predictable. My own affective response to the hostel as a place of tension takes on new

meaning in relation to the pressures that hostel girls lived under; my experience of hostel life as emotionally demanding indicates the way in which my body unconsciously became one of my research tools.

Thinking through my own identity as a feminist researcher was important in refining my understanding of the inequalities that characterised my relationship as a researcher to the women that I worked with. Chandra Mohanty argues that women cannot be characterised as a unitary or monolithic group through a simplistic politics of sisterhood based on a presumed universality of gender; instead, a politics of solidarity attends to the differences and intersections that structure women's diverse experiences (Mohanty 2003). As a Pakistani-heritage female researcher, considering the similarities and differences between me and my interlocutors in the hostel was thought-provoking and is still an ongoing process. On the one hand my rural, working-class Punjabi family background meant that I had much more in common with girls living in the hostel than the elite upper-class Pakistanis that I met in feminist and environmentalist rallies. On the other hand, my mixed-race identity and British nationality, membership of an elite British university and access to doctoral funding meant that I was privileged in ways completely inaccessible to the other girls living in Fahmida Hostel. Recognising the disparities between our respective positions was vital for attending to the inequalities within our relationships as researcher/research subject. However, to my surprise, it also offered an unexpected analytical tool. Because I was seen as a naïve foreign student who was not habituated to Pakistani culture, I was given warnings not to trust strangers and advice about how to conduct myself safely in the hostile space of the city. Friends pityingly took responsibility for restyling my hair, clothing and make-up to remedy my ignorance about how to 'groom' myself appropriately, and girls who were ambitious to live and study abroad sought me out for advice on applications and help with

proof-reading personal statements. The disparities in our relative positions therefore became a source of insight into some of the themes that I discuss in this thesis.

Structure of thesis

The thesis falls loosely into three parts. The first part, comprised of chapters 1-3, focuses on the site of Fahmida Hostel itself and its situation in the wider context of Pakistan. In Chapter 1, I trace the journeys made by girls living in hostels make from the rural hinterlands to the cities of Pakistan, and argue that these journeys are both geographic, traversing space, and culturally symbolic of a move from being 'backward' to being 'educated'. Chapter 2 considers some of the scholarly discourses around hostels in Pakistan and provides ethnographic evidence for two emic discourses, one based on a rhetoric of consumer power which I call 'hostel talk', and the other drawing on an attitude of fear and caution which I call hostel 'horror stories.' In Chapter 3, I describe how different hostel residents inhabit the space and time of the hostel in relation to two simultaneously operating spatial logics, one formulated around separation from others and another based on dense, multi-person occupation of space to maximise profit.

The second part of the thesis, chapters 4-6, explores the way that hostel girls experience their lives in the city and construct themselves as modern, confident, urbane women. Chapter 4 follows one hostel girl, Malalai, in considering how a discourse of generalised mistrust in other human interacts with a discourse of complete trust in God to produce behaviours of personal boundary maintenance, self-protection and safety work. Chapter 5 focuses on ideas of beauty and the emic notion of being 'groomed', and again follows one hostel girl, Tabassum, through a series of modifications to her own appearance as she

prepares for a potential proposal of marriage. In Chapter 6, I explore practices of worlding as hostel girls imaginatively inhabit disparate territories, including Lahore, Pakistan and the wider world.

The final part of the thesis is composed of chapters 7 and 8. Chapter 7 reprises a theme of home introduced in Chapter 3 and argues that the hostel is a site for the cultivation of endurance and patience (*bardasht aur sabr)* because the strains of hostel life are seen as good preparation for the future. Chapter 7 also explores practices of friendship and mutual care among hostel girls that, unlike hostel girls' general orientation towards the future, are lived in the present tense, immediate and sensory. Chapter 8 offers a methodological and reflexive discussion of how to engage analytically with issues of incompleteness and absence in ethnographic knowledge, and argues that absence can be generative, rather than simply a methodological issue to be overcome.

To protect the identity and privacy of my interlocutors, I have changed names and identifying details, and I have purposely obscured certain information about Fahmida Hostel's location to make it harder to identify.

Chapter 1: From the backwards areas to the city: narratives of progress and the cruel optimism of education

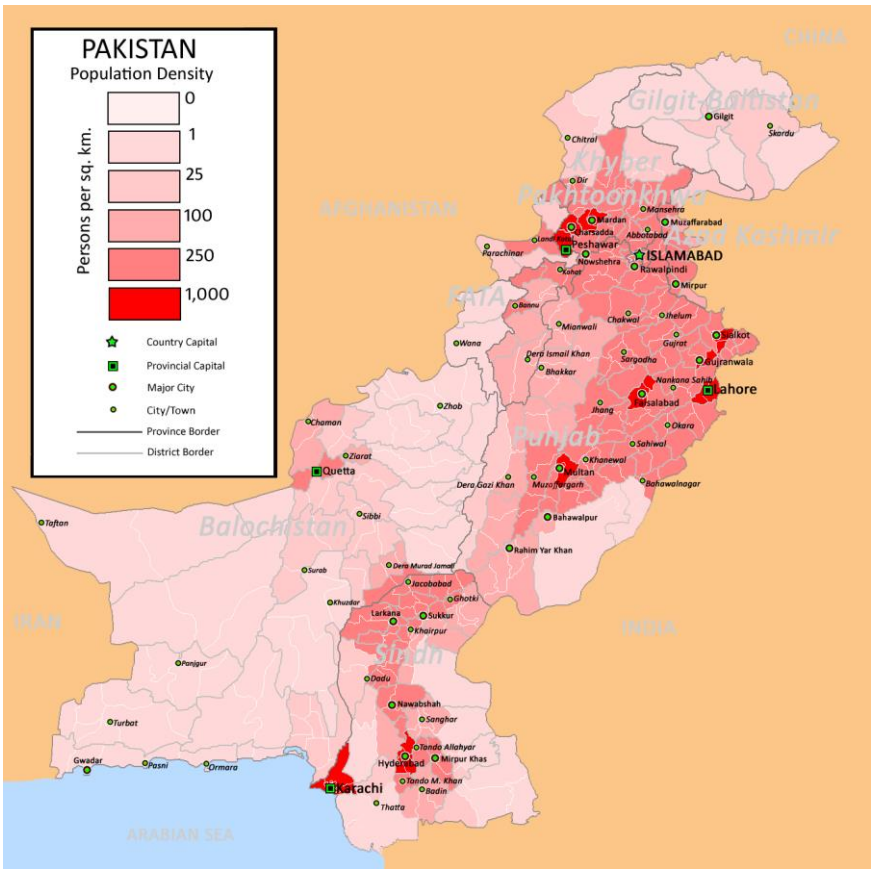


Figure 1: Map of Pakistan showing regional population density. Source: https://www.populationdata.net/cartes/pakistan-densite/ accessed on 23rd October 2022

Within the first few weeks of my residence in Fahmida Girls' Hostel in Amber Town, I went to a bookshop and bought two large maps. One was a map of Lahore, showing the main districts and travel routes. The other was a map of Pakistan that, alongside the political borders of the four regions, also showed the topography of the terrain by rendering rural areas in greens and brown and urban centres in shades of yellow, orange and red to indicate size and density of population. My plan was to annotate these maps over time with the information that I gathered in fieldwork, learning how women in the hostel experienced

different parts of the city and how these imagined spaces fit within larger imagined borders. While I no longer have access to these maps, over the time that I lived in the hostel I recall the second map, the one of Pakistan, being of far more interest than the map of Lahore. Girls living in the hostel would often point out places of personal and familial history, like the army base in the north of Pakistan where Samayya had been born, or the fort where Rabieh's grandfather was buried. Others would mark out the villages or provincial towns where their families still lived, and would use a pencil to trace the long and arduous routes that they had taken to arrive in Lahore in order to become educated. Most girls living within the hostel came from within the Punjab, but even so their journeys to the city often covered hundreds of miles and took several hours, as well as significant planning and coordination, to accomplish. Girls from other regions had even longer journeys, as much as twenty to thirty hours from the northern regions, or around two days' journey from the south of Pakistan. The lines drawn on the map stretched densely throughout the Punjab and more thinly through the other regions of Pakistan, coalescing on Lahore to give the effect of a many-legged spider.

One of the benefits of combining the pictorial lines on the map with girls' spoken descriptions of their journeys was the ability to problematise a seemingly simple flow of movement across space. In contrast to the time-space compression that Harvey (1989) considers as a defining feature of globalisation, feminist geographers call attention to the time-space expansion experienced by marginalised populations, whose relationship to the global is characterised by laboured struggles of distance and time (Massey 1994; Sharma 2014; Datta 2020). Ambaa, a composed and self-sufficient seventeen-year-old studying for her medical school entrance, carefully traced a three-stage journey, beginning at her family home in the south of Punjab. Her father or brother would drive her more than an hour's

journey to the nearest town with a bus connection to Lahore. There was no other way for Ambaa to reach the town, so her journeys to and from the city had to be planned according to the availability of a male relative to make a two-hour round trip, as well in relation to the twice-weekly schedule for bus departures. From the local town, Ambaa would take an eight-hour bus ride to Lahore. The journey was long and onerous, and although her mother usually gave her snacks and drinks for the journey Ambaa would try not to eat or drink anything, no matter how thirsty or hungry she became, as there were no toilet facilities onboard. The bus would stop at a halfway point where passengers could disembark, buy refreshments and use a restroom, but Ambaa would usually remain onboard, unwilling to leave the bus unaccompanied. After eight hours' travelling, she would arrive at the central bus station in Lahore. There she would collect her bags from the storage compartment under the bus and purposefully hail a rickshaw for the final stage of the journey to the hostel, exuding assertiveness to discourage any potential thieves tempted to rob a young woman travelling alone. Ambaa's journeys to the city, like those of other girls in the hostel, were structured by familial relationships and obligations, infrastructural provision and a ubiquitous discourse of classed and gendered risk.

Interactions with the map also revealed that girls conceptualised their journeys from their rural hometowns to the city as traversing time as well as space. When girls described the transitions they had made from their rural hometowns to the metropolis of Lahore, they spoke of making a journey from areas that were old-fashioned, regressive and temporally behind the present to an area characterised by speed, swiftness and hyper-modernity. They described this transition through the emic term of 'backwardness', inserting this English term and its cognate 'backward' seamlessly into Punjabi and Urdu speech. Backwardness was used to describe material, cultural and experiential disparity. As an attribute of

geographic areas, backwardness was understood in terms of a lack of infrastructure and development. Backwardness was also conceptualised as a characteristic of people who lived in those areas. Hostel girls, I was told, come to the city from 'backwards areas,' or are prevented from coming by 'backwards mentalities'; once in Lahore, they must overcome their own 'backwards' habits and practices, such as shyness, credulity and dependence on others, in order to 'adjust' to city life. Central to the imagined difference between the city and the 'backwards' countryside is a distinction in temporality. The city is figured as a place of speed, modernity and futurity, in contrast to the backwards areas which are imagined as nonmodern, culturally and technologically regressive and fixed in a static past (Fabian 1983). The very colours on the map affixed to my bedroom wall seemed to support this reading; in the cool, organic green and brown tones of the rural areas, red, orange and yellow dots conveyed the light and heat of urban centres, suggestive of a Levi-Straussian distinction between hot and cold societies (Lévi-Strauss 1966).

The symbolic opposition of the city and the countryside has been documented in a range of contexts (Williams 1973), as has the formulation of this difference in terms of temporality. In 1932, Ernst Bloch asserted that 'not everyone lives in the same Now' (1977:22) and argued that peasants live in a different time from urban residents so that 'economically and ideologically, the peasants, in the midst of the flexible capitalist century, are situated in an older place' (1977:25). The attribution of a temporal quality to spatial distribution gives rise to assertions of human allochronism (Fabian 1983: 23), where co-existing populations are nonetheless conceptualised as temporally disparate. However, while Fabian draws attention to allochronism within the conventions of ethnographic writing, conceptualisations of spatio-temporal disparity have lived meaning beyond academic

formulations. For hostel girls moving from the 'backwards areas' to the cities of Pakistan, the transition through space becomes experienced simultaneously as a journey through time.

In this chapter, I argue that we cannot understand the trope of backwardness within the lives of hostel girls without understanding its conceptual opposite – education. Following Kathryn Anderson-Levitt (2012:16) who notes that anthropologies of education tend to follow regional themes, I argue that the notion of backwardness is central to the way that education is understood in South Asia (Lukose 2009; Sen 1999; Holland & Yousofi 2014). While backwardness is conceptualised in terms of ignorance, darkness and lack, education is framed as the knowledge, light and abundance that diametrically opposes and eradicates backwardness, much as light banishes darkness or an object displaces liquid in a container. Within this conceptual opposition, education is thought of schooling in formalised settings, and while not necessarily secular, is typically imagined as following a formal, Western-style curriculum (Anderson-Levitt 2012). Moreover, this image of education is strongly centred upon the city. In Pakistan, the conceptual relationship between education and backwardness takes on an explicitly spatial dimension because of colonial infrastructural legacies, which resulted in a highly centralised distribution of schools, colleges and universities in Pakistani urban centres. In the colonial era this gave Lahore a reputation as a city of students (Nevile 1997), which has continued into the postcolonial era, with tens of thousands of students migrating from across Pakistan every year to enrol in institutions of higher education. The temporal disparity between the backward areas and the city hence takes on two levels of meaning. Following Frances Pine's characterisation as migration as a future-oriented practice of hope that entails migrants living across different temporalities (Pine 2014), I argue that migration from the backwards areas to the cities becomes formulated as a way of

escaping backwardness both geographically, by leaving the backwards areas behind, and symbolically, by becoming educated.

As rural-origin migrants from non-elite families, hostel girls might be viewed as ideal recipients of education. Discourses about women's education take on a strongly teleological edge as a self-evident and clearly justified marker of social progress and modernity, and girls' journeys to the city in search of education are easily assimilable to global narratives about gendered empowerment as individualised liberation through the acquisition of knowledge, rights and habitus. However, in this chapter, I join others (Adely 2012; Khurshid 2017; Shah & Khurshid 2019; Jeffrey et al. 2008) who critique simplistic narratives about the ability of education to effect women's empowerment. I argue that the ideology of education as liberatory for women masks a cruel optimism (Berlant 2011) by placing a burden of hope upon young women that structural conditions cannot justify. Berlant defines cruel optimism as 'the condition of maintaining an attachment to a significantly problematic object' (2011:24), where attachment to the object itself compromises wellbeing. Regarding education as liberatory ignores how the possibilities for educated young people themselves become progressively narrower. More broadly, the discourse of education as empowering ignores how women are expected to take on multiple burdens of care, responsibility and labour which impacts their ability to enact the theoretical potential of their education.

The discourse of backwardness: spatial, cultural, 'lack'

While carrying out a literature review for this chapter, I was struck by the way that a number of Pakistani writers use the term as a seemingly neutral and objective description of a social fact. Thus, Manzoor writes about the 'historical backwardness of Punjab', which he attributes to lack of education and technology (Manzoor 1993), Khurshid and Shah use

without qualification the term ‘backward’ in describing the origin of some of their interlocutors (Shah & Khurshid 2019), and research on rural women in southern Punjab asserts that ‘education takes us forward away from backwardness’ (Abrar-ul-haq et al. 2017:1777). These uses mirror my own conversations with hostel girls in Lahore, among whom ‘backwardness’ seemed to be a highly normalised concept necessitating no discussion. Indeed, when I asked for explanations of what was meant by ‘backward’, girls seemed to struggle – it appeared to be a concept that was based on shared and unstated feeling, rather than something that was easy to put into words.

The concept of backwardness is operationalized differently in different settings. McDowell traces a genealogy originating in the colonial era, during which at least six commissions on the backwardness of specific groups evidenced the ‘fantasy echoes’ of colonial administrators attempting to enumerate and rank a bewildering diversity of colonised populations (McDowell 2012:352). Colonial ideology not only premised an explicitly racist teleology of progress wherein white British citizens were at the apex of civilisation and non-white colonial subjects were in the process of becoming civilised, but also posited internal distinctions of primitiveness and assimilability to modernity within the wider body of Indian colonial subjects. Thus, specific regions, peoples and cultures became enumerated as ‘backward’, considered culturally static, deficient and asynchronous with modernity. In contemporary India, the institutionalisation of backwardness within social designations of caste and origin mean that identification of backwardness has social, political and economic value (Jaffrelot 2003; Michelutti 2004), such that McDowell argues that ‘Backward categories are not mere taxonomies. They are forms of citizenship aligned with whole sets of structures managing the relationship between state and citizen’ (McDowell 2012: 351). However, even where backwardness is not formally

institutionalised, there is a striking overlap in its meanings and implications. Although broadly similar equivalent terms exist, such as *mufassil* (provincial) or *picchhe hue* (backward/ behind), the widespread use of 'backwardness' perhaps is related to its English origin, which potentially connotes a sense of modernity. While backwardness is often spatially located, equivalent to areas far from cities, there also seems to be a sense that distance in space equates to a distance through time, with backward areas temporally lagging behind areas considered to be modern. Thus, Stacey Leigh Pigg shows that in Nepal, rural society becomes essentialised as an idealised, normative village that is placed 'backwards in time' (Pigg 1992:506), Lucinda Ramberg describes how devadasi dedication practices in south India are interpreted as signs of families 'being out of sync with the linear time of historical progress' (Ramberg 2016:223) and Tahir Naqvi argues that the Basic Democracy scheme in Pakistan posited a territorial quality to Pakistani citizens, with rural citizens imagined as 'isolated, immutable, pious, authentic and lacking' in contrast to the urban citizens of Dhaka and Karachi (Naqvi 2013:291).

Following from the asynchronicity of backward and non-backward areas is a perceived difference in resources and culture. The backwardness of villages in Nepal is partially manifested through a lack of *bikas*, development, which is quantitatively measurable as 'in common usage it connotes things: new breeds of goats and chickens, water pipes, electricity, videos, schools, commercial fertiliser' (Pigg 1992: 499). In Bangladesh, Crow and Murshid describe the rural region of their research as backward because 'productivity of the land is low and investment in new agricultural technology slight' (Crow & Murshid 1992:39), while in south India '[backwardness] is legible as a lack of infrastructure, or absence of "development"' (Ramberg 2016: 227). Tabassum, a fellow hostel resident of mine, also reckoned backwardness in terms of a lack of resources, recalling her hometown as backward

because “it is a small town. Not much is there. The things that I need I cannot get there. Now it is changing slowly; it is becoming better. There are branded shops. The town is becoming more developed. It was very backward.” For Tabassum, backwardness was legible in a lack of branded goods and the ability to consume, concurring with McDowell’s suggestion that anxieties about backwardness seem to be particularly salient at moments of capitalist exchange (McDowell 2012: 357).

Backwardness was often conceptualised as a character aspect or a cultural attribute of people living in backwards areas. Sometimes it was used to imply a need for protection - Gilmartin describes how prior to Independence in undivided Punjab, the Unionist Party was portrayed as protecting the ‘backward classes’ in Punjab from colonial capitalism (Gilmartin 1988:116–7). In other uses, however, appelations such as *pindu* (villager), *dehati* (rural dweller), and indeed backward evaluated people not only geographically but morally, with more or less overt assessments implied of their intelligence, savoire-faire and cultural competence. Ramberg notes that in south India people read backwardness ‘not only in the presence of “archaic” practices such as dedicating children to deities but also in the way people live, talk, have sex, and comport themselves…. it is invoked both as a characterological trait that marks civilizational lack and as a socioeconomic condition of state neglect and marginality to capital’ (Ramberg 2016: 227). Among my interlocutors, people living in ‘backwards areas’ were considered ‘simple’, *masoom* (innocent) and *seedhe* (straight), in comparison to city dwellers who were *tez* (fast) and *chalaak* (cunning), able to exploit and profit from the naiveté and credulity of backward villagers. Distrust of the cunning and sharpness of city-dwellers was sometimes combined with a grudging respect, but more often it was spoken of bitterly by migrants who wrathfully recounted their experiences of being cheated by a deceitful landlord or employer in the city.

In my own fieldwork I found that these qualities of backwardness – spatio-temporal difference, quantitative lack of resource and cultural deficiency – recurred frequently in the narratives of hostel girls. Not all assessments of backward areas were negative – they were also characterised as *saaf* (clean) and *pur-sukoon* (peaceful) with people who were *seedhe* (straightforward) and 'simple.' In contrast, the city was understood as a place of *shor* (noise), *larai* (conflict) and *gandagi* (dirtiness), where people were *chalaak* (cunning) and *tez* (fast/dishonest). Nevertheless, the possibility of building a worthwhile life in the backward areas was never entertained. It seemed universally accepted that, to succeed, at least some time in the city was necessary. One of my hostel-mates, Samayya, made this clear to me. Samayya was a student at one of the modern universities in Lahore, studying for a HR qualification and hoping to get a job in an office after graduation. One afternoon, she told me about her life.

"My father was in the army, and our family shifted a lot when I was growing up. Now my parents have settled in our home village. It is very *backward* there." Samayya's tone was neutral and informative; no censure seemed to be attached to the label of 'backward'. I took the opportunity to ask,

"Samayya, when you say that your village is *backward*, what does that mean?"

Samayya paused for a moment, looking perplexed. It seemed difficult for her to put into words.

"Backwards areas are places where there are no facilities (*sahauliat*), and where the people are not educated (*anparh*). People come from the backwards areas to the city if they have ambition, if they want to succeed. It is only in the last ten years that people have been coming to the cities, especially girls. Many girls in my village are married in the eighth

grade. Even in my own family, my *thaiyya* [paternal uncle, elder to the father] says that girls do not need to be taught after eighth grade, or middle [around 14 years old]. He says, what is the point in teaching girls? But my father is different. He always cared about learning, he enjoyed it himself and he wanted his girls to learn. My father was the one who wanted me to study."

Like Tabassum, Samayya defined backwardness in terms of lack of facilities. In backward areas, she suggests, there are no facilities (*sahauliat*), and the *anparh*, uneducated nature of people in backwards areas could in one sense be attributed matter-of-factly to this lack of resources - where there were no schools, how could one be educated? However, Samayya's point that 'people come from the backwards areas to the city if they have ambition, if they want to succeed' also suggested a more deliberate element of choice and self-willed activity to the question of escaping backwardness. Samayya's framing suggested that, while the facilities in one's area might not be something a person had control over, the people who were desirous of success would take the steps required to achieve, leaving the backward areas in order to come to the cities. Within this framing of achievement, those who did not, or could not, leave the backward areas were those lacking in ambition, confirming their backwardness as inherent. Backwardness here takes on either an abject quality, confirming a person as a repudiated non-subject Other (Butler 2011), or a quality of incompleteness, interpreted as being only a preliminary and impermanent stage within a teleology of individual progress and achievement.

Education as a remedy to backwardness

In contrast to depictions of backwardness as static and unchanging, education is often discussed in language with a strongly directional quality, in terms of progress, advancement, development and modernity (Lukose 2009; Levinson et al. 1996; Holland & Yousofi 2014). During the era of colonialism in India, the act of spreading education itself became one of the liberal justifications for British imperialism. Colonial rule was viewed as a means of spreading civilization to less developed peoples by imparting cultural values and knowledge, such that a school textbook called *The Citizen of India* described the British empire in 1897 as 'an educational experience for India' (Kumar 1991:24). An essay written in 1928 describes the move from backwardness through education in terms of advancement through space, time and social tiers of stratification:

> What the educated classes are thinking today, the masses will be thinking tomorrow. Just as the mountain-tops catch the light of the rising sun first, and then the plains, and lastly the valleys - so the light of knowledge must first shine on those whom Nature has placed in a higher sphere than the rest, and then extend itself to the labourer in the field and the artisan in the workshop.
>
> (Kumar 1991:38)

Colonial arguments in favour of education, however, were not solely advanced in terms of altruistic benefit. Education was also viewed as a means of inculcating loyalty, patriotism and desired attributes in order to develop an intermediary class who, in Macaulay's words, would be 'Indian in blood and colour, but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals and in intellect' (in Nurullah & Naik 1951:108). Colonial institutions of education were predominantly founded in urban centres, from where it was anticipated that the effects of education would percolate out to more intransigent areas. In *A History of the University of the Punjab*, Bruce notes that Lahore's location made it of interest to the government when considering the foundation of a university because it was seen as a well-placed location for

exerting influence over the 'virgin fields of the frontier' (1933: 61).[1]. The promise of escaping backwardness thus became enacted in at least two different ways – first on a socio-cultural level, based on the dissemination of supposedly advanced cultural forms and knowledge to less enlightened colonial subjects, and second on a geospatial level, as ambitious youths were induced to migrate from rural areas to colonial cities in order to receive education. While the number of students receiving education in urban centres was only ever a small proportion of the total population, rural-to-urban migrants nonetheless seemed to make up a significant proportion of these students. In 1932 Bruce noted that '8,074 University College students [resided] in Lahore, of whom only about one-third belonged to Lahore' (1933: 173). This trend of rural-urban migration continued into the postcolonial era in Pakistan; Maskiell (1979) notes that around forty per cent of Kinnaird's students between 1947 and 1960 were from rural areas.

The trend of rural-urban migration can be observed in the present day. In 2020, the Pakistani Bureau of Statistics noted that rural to urban migration accounts for about one in eight (11.7%) of the total flow of migrants within and between areas (Pakistan Demographic Survey 2020: 65), while education was the primary cause of migration for 1.28 per cent of all migrants within Pakistan (PBS 2021). While this is a comparatively small proportion of the total number of migrants, the sheer size of Pakistan's population makes this number still numerically impressive. Over one and a half million students per year enrol in metropolitan Pakistani universities, 289,652 of which are enrolled in institutions in Lahore (HECP 2018). Although I have not, to date, found statistics on the total number of rural-urban migrant students, the growing number of hostels targeted at students offers indirect evidence of a

[1] Similar geopolitical interests continue to inflect discourses about education in the present day, as US aid to Pakistani educational systems is conceptualised as a means of combatting international terrorism (Curtis, 2007).

continued migration from rural to urban areas in search of education. In March 2022 I digitally mapped one hundred and twenty-eight hostels in the streets around Fahmida Hostel, and in my journeys across the city I observed advertisements for hundreds more, mostly centred around universities and colleges without sufficient onsite accommodation for their students.

‘My father was the one who wanted me to study’: girls’ education and the discourse of backwardness

Of the 1.28 per cent of all internal migrants within Pakistan who listed education as the primary cause of their migration, women are far outnumbered by men – just 0.25% compared to 1.03% (PBS 2021:1). However, the comparatively low proportion of women migrating for purposes of education within Pakistan is in some ways all the more notable because of the symbolism with which the topic of women’s education is invested. Longstanding colonial tropes about Indian women framed them as ignorant victims of indigenous patriarchy, who required enlightenment by imperial feminists (Ahmed 1992), colonial administrators (Mani 1999; Spivak 1988) or progressive educators (Grewal 1996; Krishnan 2017). These tropes continue in the conceptualisation of women in the Global South as a homogenous and monolithic group that is highly vulnerable to patriarchal oppression (Mohanty 2003). As Samayya’s description of her village hints, attitudes towards girls’ education are often invoked as a diagnostic of backwardness (Oppenheim 2016); one of the reasons that her village as backward is because few girls receive education beyond the eighth grade.

The positioning of women as a homogenously vulnerable group, however, means that women are also understood as a particularly potent site for the elimination of backwardness.

Education is understood as a way of creating empowered and confident, ideal female subjects (Foucault 1979), who know their rights, can earn their own living and care for their communities (Khurshid 2017; Khurshid & Saba 2018). Amartya Sen argues that 'women's education strengthens women's agency and also tends to make it more informed and skilled' (Sen 1999:192–3), improving their ability to work outside the home, earn wages and participate in society. Contrasting with the staticity and asynchrony of backwardness, the education of women often takes on a strongly future-oriented discourse. Its potential is discussed in terms of future benefit, and women are imagined as well-placed to effect intergenerational change through their identities as future mothers and caregivers, with positive effects flowing out multigenerationally. Thus, MacDonald argues that girls become 'emblems of futurity', invested with the potential to save not only themselves, but their communities, nations and future generations (MacDonald 2016:1), while Shenila Khoja-Moolji similarly notes that '[the] almost messianic promise of education is accompanied with a sturdy economic rationalization that educated girls will be able to enter the labor force, pull themselves out of poverty and contribute to the national GDP' (2017:4). Through the bodies of women, education becomes understood as almost miraculous in its potential to bring about both individual and societal transformation.

Many of the conversations around women and education construct women as the objects of discussion, rather than agents, chiming with Lal's observation that while the 'woman question' was central to the colonial encounter in India, 'the girl-child/woman appeared only as object, as site of contestation and improvement' (Lal 2013:32). During the time that I spent living in Lahore, I often heard surprised and approving comments about the hostel girls among whom I was living, especially from the upper middle-class, permanent residents of Lahore among whom I was conducting my initial fieldwork on urban change and

environmentalism. As Ammara Maqsood notes, comments upon other social groups offer rhetorical strategies for establishing class distinctions in Lahore (Maqsood 2013: 55), but unlike the disparaging evaluations of a 'backward' and illiberal new middle class that Maqsood observed, I often found that elite urban citizens spoke approvingly of the conjectured liberalism of the rural families that had allowed their daughters to come to the cities, in defiance of female seclusion and in pursuit of education. "Their families must be very progressive to allow them to study in Lahore!" commented Zahra, a university professor, and I heard similar comments several times from members of the 'old' middle class, longstanding urban residents with elite professional backgrounds. The rural location of families in the hinterlands of Pakistan made the fact of their daughters' education both surprising and praiseworthy. Sending a daughter to the city was considered a contravention of the conservative attitudes that could have been anticipated from the families' backwards locations, and a marker of liberalism that was read approvingly as modern. In this framing, families – particularly the male elders – become constructed as agents of progressiveness, taking decisive action towards female empowerment, while women themselves become strangely passive ciphers for men's agency.

Other commentators viewed the girls themselves as decisively agential in their pursuit of education. Asif *sahib*, a senior doctor in a Lahore hospital, supervised the work of many young, rural-origin doctors and nurses and saw these women as 'rebels' against their families: "These are ambitious girls who want to make something of themselves. They are rebels - they are resisting pressure from their families and from society." Asif *sahib* did his best to support them to maintain their careers, even in the face of opposition. "They have to have family support, and they can also get pressured to get married. One girl's father came from the village and wanted me to send his daughter back to get married. She did not want

to go; the marriage was to her cousin, and he was not educated. I said to her father, 'I will not send her back. If you want to remove her, that is your choice, but she is doing good work here and I will not send her away'." In Asif *sahib*'s modulation it was the women themselves who were agential, fighting for educational achievement and career success against families with 'backwards mentalities'; their only route to success would be in achieving separation from their culturally asynchronous relatives. While his understanding of rural-to-urban migrant women's agency appears more active than Zahra's, Asif *sahib*'s characterisation of the rebellious nature of ambitious young women coheres with a wider view of Muslim women as requiring emancipation from familial restrictions in order to achieve normative measures of success (Adely 2012; Khurshid & Leyava 2019).

My co-residence with hostel girls living, studying and working in Lahore meant that I developed an alternative perspective on what it meant to exit backwardness via education. Many of the girls living in private hostels that I knew were the first women in their families to be living away from home before marriage, and the first to have travelled alone to the city for the purpose of education. They were conscious of having opportunities unavailable to many of their contemporaries, and were aware that others might perceive them either as groundbreaking or as socially threatening. However, their own origin in the backwards areas and affective ties to kin still resident there nuanced their relationship with the idea of backwardness. Rather than assigning backwardness or progressiveness as a universal quality to their kin, many girls warmly credited their fathers for supporting and enabling them against criticism from other, less enlightened men of their families and communities. Samayya's father had sent her to the city against the advice of his elder brother, while Tabassum told me impressively, "My parents have sacrificed a lot for us. My father has paid lakhs for my education…he has not built a new house because he wanted me to study."

While girls spoke of their mothers with great love, and recounted tangible evidence of their care – the food parcels carefully wrapped up for Ambaa's long bus journey, the encouragement that Samayya's mother offered her when she was first alone in Lahore and homesick - it was fathers who were presented as agential in enabling them to take advantage of the possibilities that education offered.

It is striking to note the disparity between these accounts and earlier writings on Muslim girls' education, in which women-led pedagogy appears far more significant. For example, Bibi Ashraf's first-person accounts of her childhood, first published in 1899, recall her mother and grandmother's decisive influences on her education (Khoja-Moolji 2017: 48–49). The central positioning of fathers in contemporary accounts of women's success might be understood in terms of the comparatively recent entry of hostel girls' families into the middle class, meaning that fewer women of previous generations had had the opportunity of education; it could also relate to the shrinkage of lived women's spaces over the last century (Lal 2013), and the felt necessity of entering into patriarchal bargains (Kandiyoti 1988) as the price of admission to male-dominated environments. What these narratives do accomplish, however, is a reification of the concept of backwardness by presenting individual men as bastions of enlightenment in an ocean of social conservatism. Girls' accounts of their fathers present them as enlightened, open-minded and progressive as they act in opposition to a wider sphere of backwardness.

Although these three perspectives differ in their assessment of agential capacity in relation to women's education, there are some clear commonalities. Each accepts unquestioningly that girls' education characterises progressiveness and desirable modernity, while reluctance or inability to do so is inversely marked as evidence of a moral and social backwardness. As such, each characterisation firmly locates backwardness firmly in the

cultural and attitudinal realm, with little acknowledgement of the material and structural conditions of backwardness, or the multiple factors that might influence parental decision-making about girls' education (Oppenheim 2013; Oppenheim 2016). Finally, none of these three perspectives questions the ability of education to nullify backwardness. Education is imagined as the antithesis to backwardness itself, a key that unlocks a door to success on a global stage.

The cruel optimism of education

The hegemonic construction of education as key to women's empowerment is deeply powerful, offering a promise of happiness (Ahmed 2010) enthralling in its scope. However, to close this chapter I want to draw attention to the burdens experienced by hostel girls who have migrated to the cities of Pakistan in search of education, by drawing on Lauren Berlant's (2011) writing on cruel optimism. Berlant describes cruel optimism as an attachment to an object that is deleterious to wellbeing: 'an incitement to inhabit and to track the affective attachment to what we call "the good life," which is for so many a bad life that wears out the subjects who nonetheless, and at the same time, find their conditions of possibility within it' (Berlant 2011: 27). Several scholars have seen the relevance of cruel optimism to the promises that education offers, but fails to deliver (e.g. Shirazi 2020; Lipton 2017), and in tracing the cruel optimism of education, I follow Frances Vavrus' lead in ethnographic memoir-making (Vavrus 2021) by drawing on my own experience of education alongside that of the hostel girls whom I knew.

I embark on this comparison with care, conscious of the need to avoid a facile equivalency based on common gender and ethnic identity that ignores the material and political disparities between our lives. However, I also feel it is important not to separate

myself from the women that I lived with, as if they were victims of an ideology that I myself see through. As a student and aspiring scholar, conscious of my own ambitions for an academic future, I cannot segregate myself from other adherents to this object of desire, or condemn simplistically an ideology that has held such power in my own life. Moreover, identifying the commonalities in our experiences can illuminate the global processes of neoliberal restructuring that have reshaped the forms and meanings of education, and show the common structures underlying globally distinct experiences (Katz 2004). In the final part of this chapter, I draw on both my own experiences of aspiration towards academia and the life story of one of my fellow hostel mates, Zubaida, in order to show how the promise of education falls short.

"My dreams keep growing": Zubaida and the cruel optimism of education

Zubaida was in her early twenties, a slender young woman with an open countenance and a friendly smile that immediately warmed me to her when I moved into Fahmida Hostel in August 2019. Our stays overlapped only by a month or so, as Zubaida moved out of the hostel in September. However, in the month that we lived next door to each other we became friends, and Zubaida would sometimes invite me to walk with her on the roof in the evening for exercise, or to drink tea in her room when she returned from the hospital that she worked in. Over tea, she would tell me about her life and her studies.

Zubaida was one of five children from a small village in Sindh, the daughter of a primary school headteacher and a housewife. She had studied to become a doctor, something that her father had dreamed of for her since she was a child. Zubaida was conscious of the financial and personal sacrifices that her parents had made for her, and spoke gratefully of

her parents' generosity and open-mindedness in enabling her education. For all the years of her childhood, her father had taken pupils for extra tuition in order to save for her and her siblings' education, and her mother had carried out all the household chores to allow Zubeida time to study. She was the first girl in her extended family to have a university education, and her parents – particularly her father – had set an example for others:

> I owe everything to my parents. I am the first girl in my whole family to leave the home to study. This was never done in my family before. Now a cousin of mine is studying in Islamabad. She is a hostellite, too.

Zubaida felt a responsibility to demonstrate that her parents' trust in her was not misplaced. During her university years she had studied every night and avoided spending any unnecessary money on indulgences like new clothes or take-out food. Unlike other girls in her university hostel, she had never broken the six o'clock curfew to see a film or go to a mall. "When I came to Lahore, my mother said, 'Everyone [in our family] will be watching you - behave how you want them to think of you,'" she told me proudly. Even in her training year, alongside working six days a week, Zubaida was trying to find a voluntary position in a government hospital. She wanted to find an opportunity for learning for her scarce days off so that she could maximise her opportunities for learning. Zubaida was ambitious. As we walked back and forth on the roof one evening, she told me:

> I don't want to get married, I want to go on studying. I want to become a great doctor, a specialist. My father's dream was for me to become a doctor; my dream is to be a specialist. My dreams keep growing.

Now that she was finally qualified, Zubeida delighted in the status and respect she occasioned. After a day in the hospital, she would proudly describe the operations she had carried out and what she had learnt; sometimes she would read aloud from her medical textbooks in order to marvel at the wonders of the human body. Often as we sat together in the evening, other hostel girls would knock on her door to ask for medical advice – what

tablets should they take for an upset stomach, or for a low iron count? Although I felt irritated on Zubaida's behalf that her leisure time was being so interrupted, she told me that she enjoyed able to help people: "It makes me feel good that people trust me and ask me for help." Education gave her an expanding self-image of herself as knowledgeable, dynamic and powerful, with important and respected skills, and she relished her identity as a doctor.

But education had also taken a toll on Zubaida's life. The village that she had grown up in had only limited education facilities, so at the age of fourteen she had been sent to live with her much older aunt and uncle in Hyderabad so that she could attend an English-medium school. Her aunt and uncle were childless and much stricter than her own parents, and Zubaida had often been homesick for her family, especially her mother. Most evenings of her adolescence had been spent studying quietly in the small bedroom she shared with her aunt, trying not to disturb her with use of the electric light. She had attended after-school tuitions most days, had little time for leisure and was only rarely able to visit her home village and family. She looked back wistfully:

> For ten years I have seen my family very rarely. I would like to go home; I would like to be able to work and study in my area. But this is very difficult. There is a hospital in my area but no teaching hospital. You need to come to the big cities to study.

As a trainee doctor, Zubaida's schedule was still onerous: "I go to the hospital around 7.30am, come back about four and eat. I read *namaz* a little late, I sleep and then I wake up to study. I study until dinner is ready, then I eat, I talk to my mother, and then I study until midnight. Every four days I stay overnight in the hospital. I am on call, so I work all through the night and then work the next day." Although Zubaida was supposed to have a day off every week, her rest day was often cancelled so it was not unusual for her to work fourteen or fifteen days without a break. She was philosophical about her schedule: "This is training for us. We need to learn to stay awake all night and still be *fresh* in the morning."

The centrality of education to the imagination of a better world for women and girls makes it difficult to question Zubaida's commitment to her vocation as a doctor, and my own positionality within the academy makes me want to phrase my critique carefully. Learning has brought immense richness to my life, and I do not want to deprecate Zubaida's relationship to education or to ascribe to her a false consciousness from which I myself would somehow be exempt. At the same time, I was struck by the immense pressures that education had placed upon her. She had spent hours studying at night, and years living apart from her family, in order to become educated. She had surveilled her own behaviour to justify her parents' trust in her and now worked a punishing schedule that left her body aching with exhaustion when she returned to the hostel. She drew my attention regretfully to a dusting of grey hair at her temples, which she attributed to the stress of her studies, and noted that long nights poring over books had strained her eyes and caused her to need glasses. As Khurshid notes, becoming *parhi likhi* (educated) often places additional restrictions on women without translating to greater freedom or empowerment, problematising the image of women's education as generally empowering or liberating (Khurshid 2017:252). For Zubeida, education as a doctor had not only taken over her childhood and adolescence, but it also now continued to absorb her scanty leisure time.

Zubaida did not resent the pressures that she had experienced. Rather, she embraced them as formative to her own evolution into the doctor that she wanted to become, seeing the demands placed on her as 'training' that would fit her to handle the demands of her chosen career. The long hours and overnight shifts at the hospital were opportunities to hone her alertness and concentration; the need to juggle her work and studies as she prepared for qualifying examinations alongside shifts in the hospital was a way to develop her self-control, organisation and attention to detail. Zubaida's willing acceptance of responsibility

for her own self-development illustrates Foucault's argument that systems of power do not always impose themselves upon individuals through force. Rather, they often become internally inculcated by individuals, who utilise various technologies of the self in order to transform themselves in accordance with desirable models of subjectivity (Foucault 1979). Discourses of personal responsibility for individual self-governance and success are widely observed within neoliberal economic regimes, where responsibility for success and failure is largely devolved to the individual in the absence of a social commitment to collective wellbeing (Ong 2007; Ikonen & Nikunen 2019; Scharff 2016; Ong 2006). The expectation that individuals will accept personal responsibility for their own welfare and achievement is often described as responsibilisation, and Zubaida and I imbibed this pressure in different, but comparable ways. Zubaida's aspiration to become a doctor, and a specialist in her chosen field, incited her to long hours of study and earnest commitment to additional hours of training. Similarly, following the pressure Scharff notes for academics to be 'always on' (Scharff 2018), I was constantly on the look-out for opportunities to teach, publish and present work in order to build an academic career for myself.

If the burden of education were accompanied by a certainty of success that would justify years of toil, perhaps the sacrifices that Zubaida and I were making would have felt more worthwhile. The cruelty of our respective commitments to education as an object of desire, however, stems from the precarity of the future that this education promised. For myself, as I talked with Zubaida about our respective hopes for the future, I was simultaneously aware of the precarity of my own ambitions. Futures in the academy appear increasingly uncertain for aspiring academics, with the global neoliberalisation of education making precarious, short-term contracts the most common form of employment. Zubaida's profession of medicine was similarly characterised by long hours, poor pay and strongly hierarchical

relations, but even more of a concern for Zubaida was her fear that she might not be able to continue working after marriage. Her engagement had been fixed some months ago to a cousin in Karachi, and when she returned home in September she would go to live with her husband and parents-in-law. Zubaida knew that whether she would be able to continue working largely depended on whether her in-laws would support her to do so by sharing household labour, something she was not at all sure would be the case.

It would be easy to interpret Zubaida's mistrust of her future in-laws' intentions through the trope of backwardness, reading the possibility of her exit from the workplace in terms of an individual family's lack of enlightenment and progressiveness. This interpretation would allow the continuation of the comforting assumption that the answer to women's inequality and to backwardness generally is through education, and that those people standing in Zubaida's way could simply be taught to have different opinions. However, it is important to stress here that the barriers to Zubaida's continuing to work were not occasioned by a single family's attitude, and her own understanding of her situation was far more nuanced. She liked and trusted her fiancé and was fond of her aunt and uncle, and she was certain that none of them would deliberately seek to mislead or exploit her. However, the fact of the matter was that through marriage she would undoubtedly acquire new responsibilities in her new household, and however benign her in-laws' intentions, the burden of these would fall disproportionately on her. The anticipated strains of pregnancy, labour and childbirth would bring even more exhaustion to her tired and overworked body, and were unlikely to be mitigated by adapted working conditions or maternity pay within patriarchal workplaces. The widespread lack of affordable childcare would similarly limit her ability to return to work, since there would be so few options for childcare until her children were old enough to go to school. The barriers facing Zubaida chime with Masood's observations on the

situation facing women doctors in Pakistan, where women significantly outnumber men as medical students in Pakistan and excel as students. However, large numbers of female doctors end up leaving the profession soon after qualifying (Masood 2019b). Masood argues that, rather than choosing to stop working because of a lack of commitment, women doctors are driven out of the profession through 'an overarching patriarchal ideology whereby women are excluded from the workplace' (Masood & Nisar 2020:1121), including sexism, lack of opportunity for women within the workplace and little to no state childcare or maternity arrangements. Cecilie Mueenuddin similarly notes the difficulties experienced by women in Pakistan managing paid work alongside household and care responsibilities, who engage in multiple 'shifts' of daily labour (Mueenuddin 2021; Hochschild & Machung 1997), while other scholars describe the patriarchal conditions present in Pakistani workplaces more generally (Ali & Knox 2008; Jafree 2017; Masood 2019a; Mirza 2002). Moreover, the barriers to women's equity in the workforce are by no means limited to Pakistan. After my return to the UK, when I contemplated the possibility of starting a family of my own, I also had to confront the lack of affordable childcare in Britain and the fact that my own hoped-for career would probably be impacted negatively by becoming a parent. Despite our respective commitments to education as a means of fulfilling ambition, both Zubaida and I understood that education, in itself, would not be a sufficient means of overcoming structural barriers to gender equity.

The discourse of responsibilisation, which tasks individuals with the responsibility for their own success and achievement, made the burden of education on Zubaida particularly painful. Already Zubaida's long working hours and antisocial overnight rotations, albeit as a single woman without care responsibilities, compromised her ability to rest adequately and care for herself. Her impending marriage added an additional anxiety: how could she cope

with work alongside the labour of running a household and caring for children? Although Zubaida was concerned about these dangers, the only possibility she saw for overcoming them involved a greater degree of responsibilisation on her part and even more discipline and self-management. She theorised that, "I will have to be very organised...I will need to get up early to cook, and make sure everything is done before I go to work. I will learn to drive and take the children to school on my way to work. Or I will study in the evenings after the work is done and everyone has gone to bed." Zubaida's focus on her own capacity to achieve within constricted boundaries seemed to give her some sense of agency and control, offering a degree of calm against the uncertain future she was contemplating. However, her responsibilised attitude and attention to her own capacities meant that social and systemic factors, which were outside of her control to change, became rendered invisible. This raised a worrying possibility that, should she be unable to enact her plans in order to achieve her goal, she would understand this as a personal failure rather than due to the barriers she faced making success almost impossible.

The uncertainties that both Zubaida and I faced in our aspirations for the future underscore Jeffrey's comment that 'education rarely acts as some irresistible force propelling young people toward secure employment and respectable futures' (Jeffrey et al 2008: 5). Many researchers have drawn attention to the burdens occasioned by education in South Asia, including the extension of adolescence and delay of life rituals associated with maturity (Jeffrey 2010; Lukose 2009), the financial burden of privatised education (Jeffrey et al. 2008) and the emotional, intellectual and labour commitments that education entails (Khoja-Moolji 2017). Increasing levels of higher education are in part associated with global trends towards timepass and waithood (Jeffrey 2010; Inhorn & Smith-Hefner 2021; Hashemi 2015), which Inhorn and Smith-Hefner also connect with neoliberal processes of economic

restructuring and declining opportunities among youth for employment and self-supporting lifestyles (2021:4). The uptake of education not only becomes a way of enduring the lived experience of stasis and stuckness (Hage 2009; Hashemi 2015; Cooper & Pratten 2015) but is also a means by which young people experience greater financial stress due to the felt necessity of acquiring more and higher qualifications within a market-based education system. Recognising the demands that becoming educated places on struggling individuals makes it more difficult to accept a complacent framing of education as the solution to backwardness. Rather, it becomes more tempting to understand education through the lens of cruel optimism, as an object of desire that actively works against wellbeing.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have traced the journeys that women living in hostels make from rural hinterlands, known as 'backward areas' to the city. In so doing, I have deconstructed the idiom of backwardness that is frequently employed in descriptions of these journeys. I argue that the narrative that education offers an escape route from backwardness depends on assumptions about the agency of particular actors. Education represents an individualised route to success that depends on the self-discipline of motivated subjects, but does not seek to transform social and political structures of inequality. The discourse of backwardness, then, masks the cruel optimism of education, the promise of happiness that education makes within a context where the realisation of that happiness becomes increasingly unlikely.

My brief friendship with Zubaida brought to my attention some of the shortfalls in education as a means to empowerment, but I do not know how her anxieties about her future career were resolved. Zubaida left the hostel in September 2019 and sent me photographs soon after of her wedding, but shortly afterwards her phone number went out of service. It is

possible that she lost her phone, or simply changed her number; the last I heard she had moved to Karachi and was settling into her new home with her husband and parents-in-law, and had not yet started looking for work.

Although I do not know whether her worries were justified, however, Zubeida's experiences demonstrate the shortcomings of assuming that education is necessarily formal, curriculum-based and takes place exclusively within a formalised school setting (Anderson-Levitt 2012). Through her work in the hospital and friendship with other doctors, Zubeida absorbed important information about the future she might be able to anticipate as a married doctor, and through her acquaintance with other girls in the hostel, including myself, she developed both an identity as a doctor and rehearsed strategies for dealing with an uncertain and troubling future. As Nita Kumar (2005) notes, forms of learning have always been more capacious and comprehensive than narrow conceptions of education as school-based would suggest, and Lave and Wenger's (1991) concept of communities of learning emphasises that learning is not just about acquiring knowledge, but also about constructing identity through participating in a social group. Like thousands of students who continue to migrate from rural areas to the city each year, Zubeida committed enthusiastically to techniques of responsibilisation, self-management and self-governance in order to become modern, 'groomed' and successful. While the formalised education these students undergo may not necessarily result in future career success or security, many other kinds of lessons are learned in the setting of the hostel. In the rest of this thesis, I explore some of the ways in which girls living in Fahmida Hostel learned to become urban dwellers, modern women and successful hostellites.

Chapter 2: "This hostel is like a home:" discourses of conviviality, carcerality and consumption, and the emancipatory limits of 'hostel talk'

When I went down to breakfast one sunny morning in November, most of the girls in the hostel had already left. Only Kulsoom, a vivacious graduate of Punjab University, was seated at the table, talking excitedly to Rafiq. He stood in the doorway of the kitchen, not quite in the dining room with Kulsoom but at a short distance from which they could converse.

I joined midway through their conversation, but I gathered that there had been a disturbance the night before at the hostel opposite ours. What the disturbance had consisted of was either unknown or unstated – "some… problem," said Kulsoom vaguely, but widened her eyes expressively, suggesting that it was something that couldn't be talked about publicly. All that she would say was that there had been a fight, and that there was a girl who had been sitting in a car with a man for a long time – "for about an hour. And when she got out, she had a lot of money with her. Gauria wanted to call the police, but I said 'don't do it!'" But the police had come anyway, and there had been shouting and alarm, and the whole incident was surrounded by an atmosphere of scandal.

Suddenly, Rafiq turned to address me. "You see, *Baji,* why do you think I was standing outside in the evening when you came back? Of all the hostels in Amber Town, this one is the best. *Baji* Nazia keeps a watch on who is coming and going, where people are. This hostel is like a home (*ye hostel ghar jaisa hai*). The other hostels here are not good, people come and go from them. You know that Firdaus Girls' Hostel, the one that is by the main road – that hostel is open twenty-four hours a day (c*haubis ghante khula hai*). Girls come in

and out, no one is watching." He spoke forebodingly, and then turned and went back into the kitchen.

Kulsoom and I continued talking as we ate breakfast. She told me about the hostel that she had lived in as a student, in Muslim Town. "Girls would freely order food from the street, paratha, fries, Chinese. In that area there were a lot of evening activities for girls, so it was usual to see girls out in the evening, from 6 to around 10. The police didn't stop them because they knew that they would be going or coming back from some activity. Girls weren't supposed to be socialising with boys at those events, but they could secretly give their number.

"There, the environment was strange (*ajeeb*), so I was in a lot of anxiety. Then I moved and the atmosphere here is more secure, and the food is OK, it doesn't make you sick. But now I am applying for jobs in Defence, so I might find a hostel there. In Defence hostels are very good, the timings are good, the people are decent."

* * *

The conversation between Kulsoom, Rafiq and me serves as an entry point into several questions central to this thesis. What makes a hostel good or bad? Why do girls looking for accommodation choose some hostels above others? How has the situation arisen where there is a choice about accommodation in the first place? And what conditions the choices that girls make about where to stay during their residence in the city? To address these questions, I draw on my own ethnographic research in conversation with secondary ethnographic and scholarly literature to consider some of the primary representations of hostels in South Asia. I argue that three prevailing scholarly characterisations of the hostel space - as a 'home away from home', as a carceral institution or as a laboratory for the inculcation of modern and

urbane identities - do not sufficiently account for an attitude that I consistently encountered during my fieldwork among girls living in private hostels. I summarise the latter as a sense of unavoidable financial exploitation and an accompanying adoption of a wary consumer identity. I argue that this attitude needs to be understood in terms of the privatised nature of the hostel spaces in which I conducted research. To justify my argument, I show how a consumer power was rehearsed through a constant comparison of different options for accommodation and processes of viewing, assessing and occasionally changing hostel in order to improve one's position, value for money and wellbeing. I describe this process of discussion and comparison as 'hostel talk', and acknowledge that it appears to offer some potential for empowerment in its ability to pool a collective knowledge of what different hostels offer and theoretically enables comparison and informed choice. I argue, however, that although hostel talk was popular and frequent, it was often conducive to stasis rather than movement, because it coexisted with a countervailing discourse of 'hostel horror stories' characterised by an awareness of imbalanced power in the relationship dynamics between hostellites, wardens and staff. The awareness that things could be far worse elsewhere made girls reluctant to exchange a known for an unknown evil, resulting in the rhetoric of consumer power remaining largely theoretical.

The hostel as a home?

In the ethnographic vignette at the beginning of this chapter, Rafiq described the hostel as 'like a house/home': '*ye hostel ghar jaisa hai.*' While *ghar* can be translated as either 'house' or 'home', my interpretation of Rafiq's meaning was as 'like a home'. The expression *ghar jaisa* connotes 'feeling at home' or 'homely'; in contrast to *makan*, which describes a built structure in which people live, *ghar* connotes something less tangible, about

the domestic and homely quality of a living space. By describing the hostel as ‘like a home’, Rafiq was gesturing to an emotive set of symbols connected with the idea of ‘home’ itself (Ahmed 2014). His meaning was approving, and his contrast with hostels that were not like homes disdainful.

However, the apparent warmth and taken-for-grantedness of the idea of home as a self-evidently good thing masks the way in which the idea of ‘home’ is culturally and historically constructed, as well as implicated in a wide range of political relations. Feminist scholars have argued that the imagination of ‘home’ as a sphere apart from capitalist exchange, characterised by domesticity, affection and nonmarket relationships of care, invisibilises the reproductive labour of women who are primarily tasked with caregiving, while Massey shows how anxieties about globalisation construct ‘home’ as both a refuge from and a victim of increasingly swift processes of intercultural connection and exchange (Massey 1994). The colonial history of South Asia invested ‘home’ with symbolic meaning as an imagined place of refuge from colonialism (Chatterjee 2020), in which women were tasked with highly gendered responsibilities as the guardians of cultural and spiritual authenticity, or treated as potential sources of disorder who needed to be contained (Devji 1991). These multiple constructions of the idea of home – a space of refuge as well as restriction, care as well as control – indicate the ambiguity of the discourse of homeliness, and invites considerations of what it means for a hostel to be ‘like a home’.

The likening of hostels to homes recurred frequently across different hostels. Names of hostels in the immediate area, like ‘Aunty’s Hostel’, ‘Mother’s Home’, ‘2nd Home’, and ‘Gharana’ (meaning ‘household’) connoted a warm and inviting environment conducive to ease and rest supplied by familial relationships of care that were highly gendered. Some hostels advertised themselves as providing a ‘home away from home type atmosphere’

(g*har ke bahir ghar jaisa mahaul*), while I also heard one warden proudly describe her hostel's food provision as made with the same love as a mother's home-made cooking (*maan ki haath se pakaya khana*, food made by mother's hand). Both familial relationship terms and food appeared as significant vectors for a likening of hostels to 'home'. Kinship terms such as *Bhai* (brother), *Baji* (elder sister) auntie and uncle were employed frequently within hostels, normalising relationships of proximity between hostel wardens, servants and residents (Chopra 2006) while sharing food was offered as evidence of care and kinship.

The discourse of homeliness is visible in historical accounts of hostels. In her survey of women's education in colonial India, Gail Minault notes that the Aligarh girls' school, founded in 1914, attracted boarders because of '[the founders] Shaikh and Begam Abdullah's constant efforts to gain the confidence of Muslim parents by portraying the girls' school as an extension of the girls' families, and of their own' (Minault 1998:244–5). The design of the school was explicitly formulated in terms of a respectable (sharif) family dwelling, with the aim that 'the school would represent a continuation of sharif family life' (Minault 1998: 243). Begam Abdullah, who moved into the hostel and took a supervisory and quasi-maternal role to the resident students, personally tasted each dish cooked for the girls as well as supervising the housekeeping and laundry arrangements, and Minault notes that 'She acted as a surrogate mother to all the Aligarh girls…she was fondly known as 'Ala Bi' (a nickname for mother which combines both respect and affection), and the Shaikh was called 'Papa Mian' by the students, who called each other 'Apa' (elder sister) while at school and thereafter. The management of Aligarh Girls' School consciously emphasised familial and affective ties among the fictive extended family of its students and graduates' (Minault 1998: 245). Similarly, Maskiell's description of Kinnaird College's operational logic also notes a similar concern with establishing a sense of familial life. In Kinnaird

College, commensality was envisaged as a way to disseminate the Christian way of life, while hostel life and housekeeping responsibilities were considered a means of creating 'an idealised family life' (Ḥusain 2011:61; Maskiell 1979). Familial life, care and affection seem in these characterisations to render a hostel 'home-like.'

Within Fahmida Hostel, a concern with feeling 'at home' was central to the way that Miss Nazia presented her identity as a hostel warden. Miss Nazia was a warm and charming woman in her mid-thirties, who lived in a self-contained flat or 'portion' with her husband within the hostel building and oversaw the hostel alongside her other job as a science teacher at a local college. Miss Nazia consistently emphasised that running the hostel was, for her, more than a job – it was a vocation that was borne out of her naturalised caring impulses and feminine identity. This meant that when she rented a space in the hostel to a girl, she regarded it as more than a business transaction, but instead a kind of adoption of this girl into her home and family. When I first met Miss Nazia, she told me warmly that "I feel like these girls' elder sister. When they come to me for help, when I can take care of them and sort out their problems, it makes me happy. I like having you girls in my house, I want you to feel at home." The way that Miss Nazia demonstrated a commitment to making girls feel at home was largely through bodily means, through hugs, caresses and performing acts of bodily intimacy like sitting companionably on the end of a girl's bed to chat, fussily adjusting their clothing or lending and borrowing small items like nail polish. Through acts like these she performed the identity of a caring older sister, one who was authoritative but simultaneously gossipy, fun and a peer to the hostel girls. Miss Nazia also demonstrated care through her provision of food within the hostel. Although the resident cook, Rafiq *bhai,* prepared and served all the meals within the hostel according to a rather repetitive and unvarying rota, Miss Nazia claimed responsibility for devising the menu, providing the

supplies and personally overseeing the quality of the food preparation. On special occasions such as the Prophet's birthday Miss Nazia would command Rafiq *bhai* to make a special dish for the hostel girls – generally a sweet dish like halwa or sweet rice, which usually did not form part of the daily menu – and would come to the dining room to ask us all anxiously if we had enjoyed the treat.

The idea of a hostel as a home is, to some extent, supported by the accounts of at least some hostel girls. Maskiell (1984) notes that girls at Kinnaird recalled their time at the college as an idealised family life, and Lukose (2009) notes that for some women in Kerala, their hostel became a safe, semiprivatised space within which it is possible to be playful. During my time in Lahore, I met two girls who expressed a sense of ease within their hostel environment - although they did not describe it in terms of feeling 'at home', the sense of ontological security that they expressed makes it possible to assimilate their experiences to this category of feeling. Interestingly, these two girls – Gulnar and Bakhtar – shared some commonalities that set them apart from the other hostel girls that I knew. Both were from urban, upper-middle-class families and unlike the rural-origin hostel girls that I lived with, were not the first generation of women in their families to access higher education; both were also enrolled at public universities where they had sole-occupancy bedrooms. The sense of comfort that they described finding in the hostel was explicitly centred on their rooms, the autonomy that they had over the space and the base their room offered for entry into the university and exploration of the city. Both girls had also spent some time and effort in decorating their rooms to make them more explicitly their own – Gulnar had put up postcards and images across the wall opposite her bed, while Bakhtar showed me in a video how she had strung up fairy lights across the walls of her room. It was striking that these two girls, of all those I encountered during my fieldwork, were the only two who expressed

interest or enthusiasm for curating their rooms, and was possibly related to their more affluent status as well as their sole occupation of the space.

Three qualifications, however, must be considered in relation to these characterisations of hostels as 'homes'. First, although discourses of home, family, affection and care are frequently presented as opposed to and exclusionary of market relations and capitalist dynamics, it is evident that the discourse of homeliness is in fact an advertising tactic used to render hostels attractive in a market of high competition. Prominent slogans like 'a home away from home' were positioned to appeal to potential customers, and promised a version of care that reified gendered expectations of women – typically mothers and aunts – as normalised caregivers. The very construction of this care as natural, nonmonetary and feminine simultaneously fixed women into expectations of obligatory and depreciated labour and rendered this labour the object of capitalist value precisely because of its supposedly non-capitalist nature. Women like Miss Nazia who were responsible for hostels thus experienced a double bind in the need to perform both an essentialised, feminine ethics of care that disparaged an interest in financial return alongside the imperative to turn a profit from the labour of running the hostel. In this light, the comparison of the hostel to 'home' takes on a less warmly congratulatory tone. Rather than a private sphere untouched by monetised relationships, hostels folded profit-seeking and capitalist relations into spaces of intimate proximity, essentialising gendered expectations of labour and justifying them through a discourse of homeliness.

Second, hostel girls themselves were highly sceptical about the rhetoric of hostels as 'like home', precisely because of the financial nature of the rental transaction involved in hostel residence. Girls living in Fahmida Hostel explicitly framed their stay there in terms of the amount that they paid per month, and expressed a cynical certainty that, despite her

professed warmth, Miss Nazia's main interest in them was financial. They recounted with bitterness the itemised bills they would receive each month with petty additional charges like an extra cup of tea or a helping of sugar at dinner. The fact that many of these items were comparatively small made their reckoning doubly humiliating, because girls felt that every bite they took was the object of calculation and resentment. For example, when one of my hostel mates, Malalai, moved out to a new hostel, she scornfully showed me her final bill with three midday meals, three breakfasts, two evening meals and two cups of tea carefully itemised. "See how *careful* Nazia *Baji* has been!" she said mockingly. Her use of *Baji* (elder sister) here was scornful, deprecating the rhetoric of kinship that could be compatible with a financial computation of food, labour and care. Such an itemisation ran counter to the way that Malalai considered familial love should be experienced, without reckoning or calculation; indeed, as Chapter 7 will argue, it was counter to the way that some girls within the hostel performed care for each other, sharing food, lending clothing and massaging each other's heads without apparent calculation of exchange. While Miss Nazia asserted an atmosphere of homeliness in the hostel, the position of hostellites as residents and customers meant that they had no trouble distinguishing the hostel from home.

Third, when considering the characterisation of hostels as 'home' it is important to recognise that homes are characterised by control as well as care. While 'home' is often described as a refuge from exploitation and comparative freedom from oppression, hierarchical relationships of power and control make this truer for some beings than others. Certainly, control is observed to mediate many girls' and women's experience of home, and this is mirrored in the concern with oversight, surveillance and control present in many descriptions of girls' hostels. One of the principal arguments that Rafiq advanced for the hostel being like a home at the beginning of this chapter was that "*Baji* Nazia keeps a watch

on who is coming and going, where people are", and Minault observes that descriptions of the Aligarh school as 'like home' were advanced in relation to the surveillance as much as the care within the school: 'Purdah was extremely strict. Fortress-like walls kept out all unauthorized persons, and curtained carriages transported the students on outings or to the station. Only close relatives could visit the students; even the mail was watched. Begam Abdullah had specimens of the handwriting of family members who might write to each student, and she checked the writing on all incoming letters to guard against indiscretion' (Minault 1998: 246). These forms of oversight, Minault notes, were key to convincing parents that their daughters would be as safe at school as at home, indicating the importance of gendered control as an aspect of care and homeliness. This points toward a second important theme in the scholarly literature on hostels: the theme of surveillance and carcerality.

Carcerality and surveillance

Practices of control, surveillance and punitive discipline are frequently recorded in the literature on hostels in South Asia (Krishnan 2019b; Melkote & Tharu 1983; Pothukuchi 2001). Noting the widespread presence of security guards, CCTV cameras and glass-topped walls that keep intruders out and residents in, Krishnan argues that women's hostels in Chennai 'materialise carceral conditions…using surveillance and enclosure to enforce gendered discipline' (Krishnan 2019: 1518). Krishnan's observations correspond with other descriptions of hostels, which stress a remarkable concern with the control, observation and regulation of young women's bodies and behaviour. For example, Pothukuchi notes that women's hostels in Bangalore frequently assume 'authoritarian control of residents' (2001: 373), exacting highly restrictive regulations on visitors, behaviour and dress alongside

procedures such as impracticably early curfews and ‘lights-out’ timings. Zahan and Gupta both note similar processes of gendered restriction in women’s university hostels in Delhi, impeding women students’ ability to study, attend classes or use the library and contrasting with the general lack of restriction in men’s hostels (Gupta 2020; Zahan 2020). In India, the *Pinjra Tod* (Break the Cage) movement explicitly addresses the restrictive conditions of women’s hostels in advocating for affordable and dignified accommodation options for women (Zahan 2020; Grasso & Bessant 2018; Gupta 2020; Roy 2016).

Carcerality was a defining part of the hostel experience for at least some of the women that I met in Pakistan. These tended to be women who had lived in university- or government-run hostels, under the auspices of an institution, rather than in one of the many privately managed hostels across Lahore. Thus Gulnar, who had lived for four years as a student in her university hostel, recalled exacting curfew processes: “During the night, you couldn’t go out at all. The gates closed and shut at around seven o’clock. It changed with the time of *Maghrib* (evening prayer). So usually, the kind of rough idea that they had was that before it was dark the gates needed to close.” The curfew system was so rigid that one student who returned less than ten minutes late to the hostel was refused entry. “She was outside crying and saying, ‘You say you are concerned about our security, but what about my security now, you are leaving me to stand in the street!’ But they refused to let her in. She had to stay with a friend that night.”

Durnaz, who had lived for two years in the hostels at Kinnaird College, remembered not only similarly rigid curfew regulations, but also the expectation that she would exhaustively justify all her movements. She had found this demeaning, but now worried that she had so absorbed this habit of apologetic explanation that it affected her as a professional in the workplace:

> You could not leave - I mean, you could not come back to the hostel after 5pm. Then you had to inform them, and you had to mention everything, and there was interrogation and then you had to give them explanation. So the habit of explaining everything, leaving that habit is very hard for me at workplace. Because they don't want you to explain everything, but you are into explaining everything, so at workplace then people get used to it, then if you don't explain people expect you to explain, so it's very hard for me to leave that habit. Also, some of the girls could not even meet their parents outside hostel, there were specific days when you could leave hostel and meet your parents, for example if they were in Lahore and they wanted to take you outside to some restaurant or something. Then you had to again write an application, which was very childish.

Amneh, a journalist, had lived at Forman Christian College for a year when she first arrived in Lahore from Islamabad, and had felt constantly under suspicion there: "I hated it there. The room itself was OK, it was pretty clean, but I couldn't move about easily even on campus. Every time I went to the office to pay my rent, I would be stopped three or four times and asked a lot of questions by the security guards." Mahwish, a nurse at a government hospital who lived in the attached nurses' hostel, told me bitterly:

> The rules are very restrictive. They are very suspicious of the girls. Every time you come in or go out you have to sign a slip, everywhere you go you have to give a permission slip. It is not just because they are worried about what parents will say but because a girl who keeps roaming about (*ghumti rehti hai*) will spoil the establishment. So, if they think she is moving too freely, they will give her a warning, and then she will have to leave.

Gulnar, Durnaz, Amneh and Mahwish's institutionally-based hostels tended to take a more explicitly custodial role towards their inmates, enacting an overt politics of carcerality. Appendix 1, an application form for entry into Lahore's Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) Hostel, offers further examples of carceral discipline, informing prospective residents that 'Every part of the hostel shall be open to the hostel authorities for inspection at any time of the day or night. The allotted room can be opened for official use, maintenance, audit or inspection at any time even in absence of the resident'. In contrast, privately-run hostels exhibited a far wider range of expectations, opening hours and

facilities. It was not uncommon for private hostels to have entry times ranging between 7am-10pm, something that was explained to me as accommodating 'working women' and their need to be able to enter the hostel after their working hours. This suggested a kind of politics of respectability here based on the perceived legitimacy of socially reproductive labour, as opposed to the right of women to exert autonomy over their own bodies and use of space, but the comparatively long opening hours were still striking in contrast with those observed in working women's hostels in India (Pothukuchi 2001). In my experience of living in one private hostel and visiting a number of others, it was not difficult to enter and exit at will without much overt surveillance or even apparent attention from hostel authorities.

I theorise the disparity in the levels of surveillance in relation to a disparity between institutionally-run and privately-run hostels. Institutionally-based hostels, such as Kinnaird, PU, Forman Christian College and Mahwish's hospital accommodation, tended to be significantly older in origin, mostly founded as colonial institutions and inheriting their logics of carcerality and discipline. In contrast, private hostels were far more recent in formation. Of the hundred and more in the neighbourhoods surrounding my own hostel, none were more than ten years old, and most had been set up as profit-generating businesses by enterprising business owners who had converted homes and buildings into hostels as a source of income alongside other businesses or jobs. Not only did this mean that these newer hostels lacked the same colonial heritage as the older institutional ones, but their profit-generating motive meant that hostel owners were more directly interested in attracting and retaining residents. It was common for hostel girls to look around private hostels unaccompanied by their parents and to assess the facilities against their own requirements, and I heard many girls discuss later opening hours as essential for their ability to study, work and live.

A further contrast between the literature on hostels and my own ethnography arises from how the hostel girls I knew evaluated the place of surveillance within the hostel environment. Against the student-led resistance to the carceral regimes of Delhi women's hostels (Grasso & Bessant, 2018; Gupta, 2020; Roy, 2016; Zahan, 2020), girls living in private hostels in Lahore expressed a certain, measured acceptance of oversight as evidencing appropriate levels of care. Reflecting Rafiq's criticism of a hostel where "girls come in and out, no one is watching", girls researching options for accommodation would approvingly note the presence of CCTV cameras, recalling Gamburd's observation of a Sri Lankan housemaid who praised her Middle Eastern employer's strict practices of confinement as ensuring her own respectability and safety (Gamburd 2000:226). Ambaa, in fact, criticised our hostel for not being surveillant enough. Greatly chagrined by what she considered a lack of appropriate attention to her security, she complained:

> I went to the warden and I told her, "Do you know that I am leaving every day? Have you checked your security cameras? Shouldn't there be some guard to watch me go? Where is my security? Did you even know that I am leaving every morning before anyone gets up?" She said "Yes child, I knew." But she did not know. Why was the gate locked every morning? What rubbish.

The expectation of a certain degree of surveillance as evidence of care may suggest the normalisation of carceral measures, to the point that 'exceptional measures have been so normalised that to be without them seems to many just reckless' (Krishnan 2019: 1523). The sense that I received, however, was that surveillance was experienced, at least in part, as symptomatic of the worth and value of hostel girls, such that a careful attention to their mobility, presence and security was welcomed as no more than their due and the lack thereof as an insulting refusal to value them sufficiently. In either case, experienced hostel girls had a sense of what level of surveillance was to be expected within a hostel environment and, as Chapter Three will describe, evaluated different hostels against one

another in terms of the number of cameras, the direction of their gaze and the attentiveness of the staff. Such comparisons of the features of different hostels against each other was common, and points to the development of a market in hostel provision.

Laboratories of culture

A third perspective that emerges from a literature search on hostels in Pakistan relates to the impact of hostel life for inculcating attributes within residents. Hostels are portrayed as sites of governmentality and subjectivation (Foucault & Sheridan 1995), in which individuals both work upon themselves and are worked on to become desirable subjects. Literature that I encountered in researching this chapter emphasised this theme to such a striking extent that I almost felt as if I were reading propaganda. For example, hostel life is asserted to provide students with 'a chance to learn how to live independently, gain adaptability to live with roommates and other students, share space utilities and solutions, etc…. [where] A student might get to learn self-reliance, social behavior, independence and may learn how to manage his/her time, manage his/her residential room and spend money efficiently and concentrate on studies to increase his/her academic performance' (Rafiq et al. 2021:1). Others argue that 'Hostel life… makes students more ambitious, those students who have stayed in hostels are more self-reliant and confident than other students. In hostels students learn courage and spirit from other students, and that may help students to face the practical life more confidently' (Asir Ajmal 2015:512), while Memon writes that 'Hostel life makes student a lot of ambition (sic); those students who live in the hostels are more independent and have a more confident (sic) than others' (Memon et al. 2018:95). The experience of living outside the family home and away from parental care is conceived of as key to this development, and the effect is described as one of developing independence through discipline and

training: ‘Life in the hostel makes them depend upon themselves and make them smart, active, and disciplined too’ (Rafiq et al. 2021: 2), wherein students become ‘more punctual, independent, confident, social, realistic, disciplined, and also sharp’ (Asir Ajmal 2015: 514).

These academic formulations concurred strongly with the experiences of some of the hostellites that I met. For example, Naveeda, a student living in a private hostel near the University of Punjab, described her hostel emerged as a site of value inculcation, a kind of laboratory for the dissemination of a set of cultural values. Many of these cultural values related to self-directed discipline – the ability to manage one’s own time, money and relationships with others. In this sense, the hostel appeared somewhat like a factory, a school, or one of the institutions of modern capitalist time-discipline (Thompson 1967):

> The hostel is a place we learn a lot of things - how to manage a lot of people, manage different moods. You learn to control your patience - I have big patience issues - how to manage your finances, time, university work, hostel chores. So you learn financial management and time management. In this hostel we have to maintain our own rooms - we have to wash our own laundry, manage our own ironing.
>
> When I came to hostel for the first time, I was very nervous, I didn’t know how to manage. I am more confident now - I know to deal with people, how to adjust with other people. In Pakistan every child is dependent on their parents, living in the hostel make you independent.

Time management appeared a particularly key concern for hostel girls, many of whom spoke of the importance of managing time, saving time, spending their time usefully and not wasting time. The use of financial metaphors presented time as a finite resource that needed to be maximised. For example, Malalai was keen to lose weight by exercising before dawn, after the *fajr* prayer. Her fixing on the time after *fajr* seemed to be mainly because she was never busy at this time and therefore could productively fill these free hours. She regaled us with the religious benefits of utilising the time after *fajr* rather than simply going back to sleep, the climatic suitability of exercising in the morning while the day was still cool, and

the physical benefits of exercising before breakfast in order to boost one's metabolism and burn calories. Malalai's envisioning of exercise was highly time-specific, fitting into a projected daily timetable in a way that maximised its benefits and enabled hostel girls to attend to their usual work and study schedules without interruption.

Other girls also spoke of 'using' time productively in order to maximise their output. Samayya tried to refrain from giving into sleep after *fajr,* instead studying for her university classes or reading the Qur'an. "We should use the time to do good things and gain blessing (s*awab*)," she said, while acknowledging rather guiltily that sometimes she fell asleep again despite her intentions to stay awake and study. Zubeida had also reconfigured her timetable to maximise the hours available to her for study. She decided to incorporate an afternoon nap into her daily schedule so that she could study late into the night, making use out of every waking hour. Sitting on her bed one evening, she explained to me:

> If I lie down and sleep immediately after I eat when I come back from the hospital, then I can wake for dinner. Afterwards I can work until midnight and not feel tired. But if I don't lie down and rest when I come in, then in the evening I am so tired I cannot study. And I need to study. I accomplish more when I am active. And I need to keep my mind off other things.

The determination that I encountered in the hostel to utilise every moment of time, in order to wring the utmost value out of it, is consistent with characterisations of the entrepreneurial self under neoliberal capitalism, where there is a constant sense of 'a lack of time' (Scharff 2016:113). Rosa (2013) argues that the pace of life under modernity has increased as a result of social and technical innovation, leading to a sense of time as a finite resource and a need to maximise the value of each moment. In this context, it is argued that individuals acquire an entrepreneurial mindset towards the self and attempt to maximise their own value as if they were a business (Freeman 2014; Ikonen & Nikunen 2019; Rose 1990; Scharff 2016). It is striking to note, however, the degree to which both a sense of time as

scarce and the need to maximise one's personal value seem to follow gendered patterns. Literature on experiences of waiting (Hage 2009), waithood (Inhorn & Smith-Hefner 2021) and timepass (Jeffrey 2010) as phenomena associated with global delays to maturation and adulthood have often focused on young men, for whom extended adolescence and the inability to move into adulthood is framed in terms of a crisis of masculinity. For these young men, the experience of time without purpose, fulfilment or the expectation of an end to waiting is thought to induce anomie, disconnection and violence. In contrast, delayed maturity for young women is thought to offer new possibilities, enabling delays to marriage and childbearing, higher levels of education and a re-evaluation of gender roles and the normative life course (Inhorn & Smith-Hefner 2021:4–6). Against the characterisation of men's lives as empty and unfulfilled under waithood, women are depicted as filling their time with activity in order to become entrepreneurial subjects par excellence (Gill & Scharff 2011)and ideal subjects of futurity (Harris 2004; MacDonald 2016).

In my field site, perpetual business and optimisation of the self seemed to be a way of coping with the anxieties associated with the gendered life course. Zubeida described her need to study not only in terms of maximising the value of her time, but to 'keep my mind off other things', including the marriage that was being planned for her and the uncertainty of what her future life would be like. Zubeida's determination to overcome her own bodily tiredness and optimise her schedule demonstrated that she was not passive in being imagined as an emblem of futurity, but also managing her own uncertainty about what the future held. The experience of time-optimisation in highly gendered ways nuances the depiction of hostels as laboratories of modernity. The conceptualisation of time as a finite resource in relation to a normatively gendered lifecourse, in which gendered responsibilities are anticipated as inevitable, means that there are practical implications to the inculcation of

attributes like smartness, organisation and discipline that relate to the burdens hostel girls anticipate for themselves.

Hostels as a market

So far in this chapter, I have discussed three scholarly characterisations of hostels – as places comparable to home, as carceral institutions and as laboratories of modernity. By examining these understandings in relation to my own observations, I have argued that while elements of all three depictions were present among the hostels that I knew, none of the three are entirely sufficient as ways of understanding the hostel experience. Instead, I want to present a theme that recurred repeatedly in my own observations of hostel life and which I felt was central to girls' experience of hostel life – a theme of consumerism within a capitalist market environment, in which hostels featured as a product and residents as discerning consumers. In contrast to the highly temporal nature of hostel residents' efforts to maximise their time-value, as discussed above, this marketised approach to hostel living took a highly spatial form, as prospective residents surveyed and compared hostels that were simultaneously competing against each other.

Fahmida Hostel's location near one of the large private universities of Lahore meant that hundreds of young men and women were looking for accommodation in the surrounding area. When the university had first opened, there had been few hostels and a consequent high demand for places, but in the last few years enterprising would-be business owners had sought to capitalise on the demand for accommodation by converting houses into multi-person accommodation units and employing workers as hostel staff. When I first met Miss Nazia in February 2019, while scouting fieldwork sites, she told me there were around twenty-five hostels in the area. By November 2019 her estimate had risen to forty, and when

I digitally surveyed the area in March 2022, I made a list of fifty-two hostels in Amber Town, and a further seventy-six in the neighbouring housing society, Green Town. Samayya, who had lived in Lahore for four years, reflected in 2020 that, “These days, the hostel seems very empty. There are a lot of hostels opening in this area. Before there was a lot of *rush*, there were few hostels and so there were a lot of girls. Nowadays there are a lot of hostels and there are few girls.”

While digitally surveying Amber Town and Green Town, I noticed that, although both settlements contained boys’ and girls’ hostels, there was a distinctly gendered spatial distribution, with hostels catering to girls clustered together and hostels for boys likewise (see Appendix 2). Reflecting gendered expectations about vehicle use, boys’ hostels often advertised the availability of parking for motorcycles onsite, but girls’ hostels never did. The names under which hostels appeared on the map also seemed to follow somewhat gendered patterns. As Appendix 3 demonstrates, hostels accommodating girls tended to have Arabic-derived names that often centred on similar themes, such as heaven - ‘Paradise’, ‘Firdaus’, ‘Heaven’ - and safety - ‘Secure’, ‘alHaram’ and ‘al Hafiz’. Boys’ hostels, on the other hand, tended to have names like ‘Executive’, ‘Superior’, ‘Professional’, and ‘Luxury’, suggestive of aspirations towards career and financial success rather than protection.

In the physical world, hostels were identifiable by the posters and banners hanging from the walls of houses that had been converted into hostels. Banners presented information in Urdu, English and a combination of both languages and scripts. The banners and information signs sought to offer an attractive and enticing picture of the hostel facilities, listing benefits such as hot water, a geyser, generator, wifi, security cameras and so on. Slogans like ‘a home away from home’ and ‘study in a peaceful environment’ aimed to appeal to prospective customers.

This overt discourse of marketization, and the purported consumer power that it bestowed on hostel residents as consumers, contrasts with the other scholarly characterisations of hostels that I have discussed above. Although hostels are frequently discussed in terms of tyranny towards their residents, in my fieldwork I found that the sheer number of hostels and the comparative scarcity of potential residents had the effect of recalibrating the sense of power between hostel warden and hostellite. Girls would sturdily declare that, if they were not well treated in their hostels, they would simply find another one and change residence. They often engaged in speculative conversations about the advantages and disadvantages of different hostels, comparing prices, facilities, opening times and the quality of the 'mess'. During my fieldwork, the frequency of these conversations led me to label them privately as a distinct type of conversation, which I term 'hostel talk'.

Hostel talk

Hostel talk is reminiscent of Giulia Liberatore's (2017) observation of 'mosque hopping' among Muslim women in London. Like the women who 'shopped around' by visiting different mosques and sampling different styles of religious delivery, hostel girls in Pakistan discussed the options available for accommodation among themselves and visited different hostels in order to assess the comparative quality of different possibilities. How much did this one charge compared to that one? What was the mess like at this hostel, and what were the rooms like at another one? When visiting different hostels, girls made enquiries into the quality of food and visually assessed the furnishing and accommodation available. Through hostel talk, girls tried to assess the value of the accommodation they were paying for against what else was available in a wider marketplace of hostels.

Hostel talk occurred when girls congregated together, often at the dining table in our hostel, or in the local *dars* class where girls from different hostels came together to study the Qur'an. When Neelofar and Hena announced at the dining table that they were moving hostel next week, for example, my friend and hostel roommate Tabassum was interested. Tabassum had moved into Fahmida some months before in order to be near the hospital in which she worked, but she prided herself on being an astute consumer and was always keen to engage in hostel talk to affirm that she was getting the best deal. "Where are you moving to?" she asked. "How much is the charge?"

Neelofar willingly showed us photos of her new room on her mobile phone. "It is all newly-painted," she said proudly. "The warden is a very decent man."

Rafiq snorted as he brought a plateful of freshly-cooked *roti* (flatbread) to the table. "Yes, and you will still be coming here every day, saying Rafiq *bhai,* Rafiq *bhai,* give me a *paratha*," he grumbled.

Tabassum paid no attention to Rafiq, still examining the photos closely before handing the phone back. "It looks very nice," she pronounced.

Girls shared knowledge about hostel provision with friends. Zakiya told me knowledgably, "Hostels on Mall Road are good, and so are ones in Johar Town."

"How do you know?" I asked.

"I have friends living there. And you can also tell from the area. Hostels around Mall Road tend to be good. If you are going to visit another hostel, tell me."

At the time, Zakiya was seriously considering moving, or 'shifting', to another hostel. She had come into conflict with Miss Nazia and was deeply resentful of the latter's

disdainful treatment of her when Zakiya's rent was late – Miss Nazia had told her she was 'ruining the atmosphere of the hostel' and had slapped her in front of other girls, ostensibly in play but humiliating Zakiya considerably. Zakiya resented both the treatment she had received and the conditions under which she was living in the hostel. She and Samayya shared a room on the top floor, opening out onto the roof. It was hot in summer, cold in winter and had no air conditioning unit. Zakiya complained,

"I am paying so much money for a room that is like a storeroom! It's a very bad room. Water comes under the door and the fan doesn't work."

Malalai was also unhappy in our hostel and was considering options for leaving. When she, Samayya and Zakiya went together to view an empty room in a neighbouring hostel, I accompanied them and looked around the hostel before the owner, a middle-aged man, met with us in his office to detail the monthly fees and arrangements for meals, cleaning, hot water and electricity. While viewing the hostel the other girls were circumspect, expressing little opinion and taking photographs of the different aspects of the rooms on their phones, but afterwards we animatedly discussed the merits and disadvantages of the room.

"I really like the balcony off the room, and the owner seemed very nice. He seemed like a family man, he was decent (*sharif*). I got a good feeling from him," declared Malalai warmly. Of all of us, she was the most eager to move, and seemed unwilling to admit any disadvantages. "And the garden is a good point. We can walk on the grass after *fajr*, we can use the grass for exercise."

"I am not sure about the mess situation," replied Zakiya, cautiously. There was no dining room in the hostel we had seen. "I do not like the idea of eating food in the room – it makes things smelly and dirty."

“Let us make a list of good points and bad points,” said Samayya, judiciously. “I think the good points are the garden and the balcony. The bad points are the *mess* and the darkness in the inside rooms.”

The careful evaluation of hostel features that this conversation exemplified was a common feature of hostel talk. Girls considering their options for accommodation were keen to inform themselves about what they could expect in a hostel and sought out as much information as they could. When viewing a hostel, they would meet with the hostel warden in order to ask about charges and facilities, enquiring about the presence of a generator, whether hot water was available and at what time, and about the weekly mess menu.

A few weeks after our visit, Malalai moved alone to a third hostel. She was extremely enthusiastic about her new accommodation and tried to persuade us to join her there. “The atmosphere is clean and decent (*mahaul saaf-suthra hai*), it’s peaceful (s*ukoon hai*). No one bothers me, there’s no trouble. The warden is very nice and cute, she didn’t ask for security or for an ID card. The food is good, and you can eat as much as you want, six or seven rotis if you want. There is even pickle! There is a kitchen so you can cook all your favourite things. There is a window so I can watch the rain. Even the washroom is OK. I just need to get a small table to go by the bed to put things on.” Malalai’s listing of positive attributes of her new hostel was exhaustive, and the detail into which she went suggested how carefully she had factored her comparison of her different options.

Zakiya, on the other hand, seemed to recalibrate her assessment of her current accommodation in light of what she had seen and was more favourably disposed towards staying, even when Miss Nazia announced that she was going to put a third bed in Samayya and Zakiya’s room. Samayya was keen that they should move hostel. She tried to convince

Zakiya: “In another hostel we can find a two-seater that has a carpet for 9000. Here we are paying 10000 for a room that looks like a storeroom!” But Zakiya was nonchalant: “Let her put a bed in here. Who will take this room? No one will pay 10000 to sleep in here.” In Zakiya’s reckoning, the disparity between their room and others meant that the possibility of a stranger moving into their room was remote. All Miss Nazia’s efforts would do would be to give Zakiya and Samayya an extra piece of furniture that they could lay out their clothes on.

The comparison and ranking of different possibilities gave hostel girls a feeling of power and agency in their options for accommodation. If they were dissatisfied with their hostel, they told themselves and each other, they would simply ‘shift’; they did not have to endure poor food, humiliating treatment or impractical curfew restrictions, because they could easily look around for an option that better suited their needs. Their awareness of alternatives made them more discerning consumers with better appreciation of what they could expect, and sometimes girls would weaponise their knowledge of the hostel market, and the availability of other options for accommodation, to negotiate better conditions. One evening at dinner, Tabassum made a wry face when she tasted the rice. “*Bhai*, where is this rice from?” she called to Rafiq in the kitchen.

“*Baji* gave it to me,” he answered.

Stony-faced, Tabassum shifted the rice about on her place. “I think we should complain to the warden,” she told me, speaking in English. “The food is becoming worse and worse. The meat was in a watery sauce, the chickpeas yesterday were watery, and now this rice that sticks in the throat (*gardanwala chawal)*?” She took a long drink of water, stood up and

beckoned me to follow her; I hastily swallowed my mouthful. When I reached the warden's office, Tabassum was already sitting in front of the desk and Miss Nazia was expostulating:

"I get the milk myself, I order it... I bought the rice, but they put the good rice at the top and the bad rice at the bottom…"

Calmly and authoritatively, Tabassum cut across the warden's protestations. "*Baji*, we are here because of the food. I work hard in the hospital, and I need to eat well when I rest. If the food is not good, then we will go elsewhere."

Miss Nazia became a little less defensive. "Actually, I have been a little distracted recently. My sister has had her baby, but the baby was not well, this is why I have not been keeping an eye on it. I will sort this out."

When we left the office, Tabassum told me what I had missed. "I said, '*Baji*, I have a problem,' and she said -" Tabassum put on a slightly pompous voice, imitating the warden: "'Yes child, tell me, what is the problem?'

"And then I told her. 'The food day by day is getting worse…the meat…the chickpeas…this *gardanwala chawal*…the raita is like water...' She told me she has been distracted, but how does that explain why there is so much water in the daal?" Tabassum spoke darkly, suspicious of the warden's excuses. "So I told her: 'There are hostels where we can pay 8000 and get three times mess. We are here just for the food. This is very far from my hospital, why should I be here? If we are not going to get good food, then we will just go.'"

Tabassum was triumphant after this conversation with the warden, and the other hostellites whom she told shared her delight. "You did absolutely right," declared Samayya, while Ambaa grinned and clasped Tabassum's hand in celebration. Tabassum was clearly

proud of herself, recounting the story again. “I spoke to her very respectfully (*tameez se*), I didn’t fight (*larai nahin ki*) but I told her: ‘we are just here for the food. If we can’t get good food, we will go elsewhere.’”

In the days following this discussion Tabassum drew my attention approvingly to an improvement in the food: “You see, through my efforts, a revolution has happened (*mere koshish se, inqilab aya*)!” Tabassum’s conversation with the warden was construed as a victory of the consumer, where hostellites had the power to extract a certain level of care in return for their rent. As time went on, however, she complained that conditions were once again getting worse – tea was being served in smaller cups to reduce the quantity, the portions of food were meaner and the quality of the ingredients poorer. Again, Tabassum drew on comparisons with other hostels to formulate her dissatisfaction, recalling the hostel that she had lived in as an undergraduate medical student.

“That hostel was better. There, we got tea with breakfast and at noon, two cups of tea a day. The hostel was bigger – there were 200 or 300 girls, but even then, we got fries with the tea on Saturday. In this hostel there are less than 30 girls, so why should it be difficult?”

Hostel talk did not only compare different hostels, but also different rooms within the same hostel. Often girls who moved into the same building would be charged quite dissimilar amounts, depending on when they moved in and the size and quality of the room. This led to comparative evaluations of rooms within the same hostel. After dinner one evening, for example, Tabassum asked if she could see Maha’s room. Maha lived on the ground floor of our hostel, in a room opening off the dining room, whereas Tabassum’s room was on the first floor and opened off the lounge. Both were ‘three seaters’, accommodating three residents, and both had an attached washroom. Maha was paying 2000

rupees less than Tabassum every month, ten thousand rather than twelve thousand, and Tabassum was considering moving room in order to reduce her expenses.

After viewing Maha's room, Tabassum went to speak to Miss Nazia about moving room, but came back a little crestfallen. If she shifted downstairs, Miss Nazia had told her, Tabassum would need to pay eleven thousand rupees a month, which would include three meals a day and tea after dinner. Maha's rent was lower because there was no air conditioning unit in her room and because she only required two meals a day. After some consideration, Tabassum decided that the saving of one thousand rupees a month was not worth these sacrifices, and that she would stay where she was. But she felt shocked by the price. "I don't know how she can charge that! But I also think there are advantages to staying in this hostel. Here it is quite safe, the security is good, the food is not contaminated and is healthy…we could shift elsewhere and it would not be so good."

Tabassum was clearly irritated, and after she had mused on this for a while, she ended by saying "Leave (*chor den*)." Because of her complaints, I assumed that she meant "Let's leave this place," and I asked her, "Are you wanting to find a new hostel?" But Tabassum looked surprised, and it was clear that I had misunderstood her.

"Leave this matter (*is bat ko chor den*)," she elaborated. "Forget it. We have to bear it (*ham ne bardasht karna hai*)."

Hostel horror stories

Tabassum's decision to stay in the room she was in, rather than change, demonstrates the ambiguity or double-sidedness of hostel talk. On the one hand, the element of comparison seemed to facilitate consumer power, as hostel residents explored different

options and pooled information with a view to positioning themselves as advantageously as possible. On the other hand, despite frequent hostel talk assessing different options for accommodation, and increasingly bitter complaints about our hostel, girls often continued to stay in the same place. Tabassum was a frequent complainant about our hostel, but usually ended by reflecting on how much worse things might be elsewhere.

> My father says, 'Beta, change to some other hostel if you don't like it.' But how can I change? When do I have the time to change? I don't have time to go around looking at different hostels. I can at least eat the food here without it making me sick; and the security is quite good, because of the cameras there isn't *thievery*. For me, the most important thing is the food. I need to be able to eat without getting sick, I need to be able to get three meals a day, otherwise I cannot work.

At the back of the decision to stick with the familiar was a sense of constant precarity and insecurity. As the burgeoning number of hostels in Amber and Green Towns suggests, privately-owned hostels are numerous and there is little publicly available information available about the conditions and facilities that potential customers might experience when resident. However, sensationalist stories about hostel life periodically circulated in the Pakistani media, including stories of unhygienic conditions and illness (Najam 2016) to incidents of rape and even murder (Shirazi & Asghar 2018). Other stories passed person-to-person through word of mouth. Durnaz, for example, told me that her brother had told her of hostel wardens savagely beating male students in the name of discipline; Wardah, who was married with teenage children, still remembered the rumours of boys disguised in *burqas* who had infiltrated the hostels of her college, Kinnaird. Borrowing from Ruth Gamburd's study of Sri Lankan maids in the Middle East, I term these accounts hostel 'horror stories' (Gamburd 2000:209). Gamburd describes how media narratives about the abuse of maids by immoral employers 'affect how a migrant experiences her own migration, how she expresses her experiences to others, and how others in her community... judge, assess, interpret,

regulate, legislate and make policy about migration' (Gamburd 2000: 210), and following Gamburd, I argue that horror stories about hostel life '*create* a reality' (2000: 214, italics in original) that influences girls' understandings of their lived environment. Accounts of abuse, exploitation, harassment and danger in disparate hostels, some named and others unnamed, induced a generalised sense of fear and a tendency towards inertia. Despite girls' dissatisfaction with their current living conditions, hostel horror stories prompted the fear that moving could be an invitation to disaster.

Hostel horror stories recall Bonhomme's (2016) characterisation of the anthropology of rumour, which he distinguishes from gossip. Bonhomme argues that rumour tends to follow patterns of diffusion that are difficult to trace; in contrast, he suggests, gossip is more firmly localised, stemming from the desire of groups to stigmatise unacceptable behaviours and to reaffirm shared values (Bonhomme 2016: 5). Many of the more sensational hostel horror stories that I heard were markedly deterritorialised, often recounted as having occurred to the friend of a friend, or an acquaintance a few steps removed from one's immediate circle. The constant circulation of these stories, combined with their lack of clearly traceable chains of transmission and authenticity, contributed to the sense of an immanent danger that was hard to fix in a geographic location. However, the uncertain origins of some horror stories should not be interpreted to denote their fictionality. Nancy Scheper-Hughes has noted that stories about organ harvesting and body-snatching, which she initially interpreted as metaphorical descriptions of precarity among the most poor and marginalised people in society, were revealed to be descriptive of widespread occurrences when she began to 'follow the bodies' (Scheper-Hughes 1996). Laura Ring similarly notes that women's stories about honour killings in a Karachi block of flats related to experiences of male anger and its lived impact on women (Ring 2006:106). Moreover, the contrast that Bonhomme draws

between rumour and gossip fails to account for the highly grounded way in which these stories were received. Although the provenance of hostel horror stories was not always clear, their audiences interpreted them as directly relevant to their own lives and directly adapted their behaviours in response. For example, Jeena, a girl studying at Kinnaird College, asked me curiously: "Is there a lot of thieving in your hostel? You are carrying such a big bag... The hostellites in my class all carry their belongings (*saman*) with them wherever they go. They do not leave anything in their rooms for fear for thieving."

Feminist characterisations of gossip as socially protective against hegemonic power structures also bear some similarity to the operation of hostel horror stories. The recounting of terrible experiences in particular hostels sometimes recalled the whisper networks (Peters 2020; King Johnson 2022) through which women cautioned each other against sexual harassers and environments of gendered threat; Tabassum, for example, warned Malalai against moving to a particular hostel because she had heard stories of a boy being found in there. However, many of the horror stories that I heard were not shared in ways that would advance collective safety or counter oppression. For example, when Zakiya and I were coming back from the neighbourhood tea stall one evening, we were stopped outside Fahmida Hostel by a young man who asked politely:

"Excuse me, I am searching for a good hostel in this area for my sister. Would you recommend this hostel?"

"You should ask to see the warden rather than us," replied Zakiya cautiously.

"Yes, I am going to, but she will not show me over the hostel, so that is why I want to know what the different hostels are like from the girls who live here. I am searching for views."

Zakiya was non-committal. “It is not bad here. The food is quite good. The rooms are clean, the security is good. If you want to know more you can ask the warden.” She drew me inside the hostel and went upstairs, and when we were out of public sight and earshot, she turned to me and laughed regretfully. “Ugh, I do not want to recommend this hostel to anyone!”

I had myself been surprised at her cautious praise of the hostel, given her own recent conflict with Miss Nazia and her desire to move out. “Why did you not tell him what you truly thought?” I asked curiously.

Zakiya shrugged as we went into her room and took off our large winter shawls. “What should I say?” she asked wryly. “Should I say, ‘the warden is very sharp and clever’?” She laughed derisively at the idea and moved on to talk of other things. Zakiya’s amusement at the idea sharing her displeasure was mirrored by Tabassum when she filled in a questionnaire I was drafting as part of my research. One of the questions was about her experience of the hostel, and she had written tersely: “Good experience.” I was intrigued by her response, knowing how furiously she had been complaining about Miss Nazia’s perceived parsimony.

“Tabassum, do you really think it was a good experience?” I asked, chaffingly.

Tabassum smiled back at me and shrugged. “What should I say?” she laughed. “Should I say *It was a bitter experience*?” Her tone was incredulous, and it was apparent that this suggestion was in jest.

Maria Peters argues that gossip is a patriarchal tool used to undermine women who, in the act of sharing information through whisper networks, ‘are depicted as [gossips] and at the same time they are made into the object of gossip once they have spoken out’ (Peters

2020:2). The backlash that Zakiya and Tabassum might anticipate, if they were more explicit, might explain why both were reticent to share views they had expressed at other times. It is also possible that they were wary of their audiences, Zakiya anticipating that the young man might recount her views to Miss Nazia and Tabassum unsure of what I would do with the words that she was writing down. I find it helpful, however, to relate hostel horror stories to Benedicte Grima's analysis of culturally meaningful performances of emotion among Paxtun women (2004). Grima notes that renditions of life stories, accounts of illness and misfortune (*gham*) take place along a spectrum of publicness, with the latter tending to be presented for a more insider audience; however, all narratives of misfortunes are by nature performative and are part of how Paxtun women live out their honour, respect and morality by 'doing *paxto*' (Grima 2004: 4). Being able to match one's story to the appropriate audience and degree of public-ness is part of how Paxtun women present themselves as moral subjects. I see the way that girls tell, listen to and act upon hostel horror stories as comparable to the narratives of misfortune that Grima describes. Hostel girls recounting horror stories were not motivated by a collective desire to undermine systems of domination in the hostel environment. Neither did they seem motivated by a desire to incite shock or horror in their listeners. Rather, detailing all the things that could go wrong in the precarious conditions of hostel life presented the narrator as wise, cautious and self-preserving, able to exercise judgement as a discriminating subject. The sharing of horror stories prompted a cautious attitude of foresight and self-preservation, conditioned by the awareness that things could be much worse elsewhere.

The invitation to stasis that hostel horror stories promoted was reinforced by the practical difficulties that girls experienced if they considered moving. Despite the rhetoric of consumer power that hostel talk invoked, the power disparities between hostel residents and

staff made shifting far from easy. Girls were aware that, if they were to give notice of departure, their warden would no longer have an incentive to behave respectfully to them and might well refuse to return their rental deposit. Unless their situation was completely unbearable, therefore, many girls hesitated to leave, weighing up the relief that they might experience in a different environment against the humiliation they might expect in the short term and the financial loss they would probably incur. Hamida, for example, lived downstairs in my hostel and was very unhappy there. Her room had originally been a 'three-seater' with three beds, but a fourth bed had been moved in to accommodate three cousins who all wished to live together, and from whose intimacy Hamida felt excluded. Furthermore, Miss Nazia had humiliated her by accusing her of stealing food from the kitchen to give to 'a friend', implying a boyfriend and therefore insulting Hamida considerably by impugning her reputation. Although Hamida was thinking about moving out, she was concerned about moving to a hostel where the living conditions might be even worse than she was currently experiencing. Although Hamida had surreptitiously gone to view another hostel, and had even canvassed some of the residents there for their experiences, she felt that her knowledge prior to moving would always be limited and therefore that any decision she made might be risky:

> Every hostel has problems so it might not be a good idea to shift. Living in a hostel is very stressful because of the other girls. Girls come from a long way away and they have very strict families, so they don't go out or do much, but when they come to the hostel there are no *restrictions*, so they go bad (*restrictions nahin hai, is liye kharab ho jati hain*).

The interaction between the two discourses of hostel talk and hostel horror stories invites a reconsideration of the supposed agency that hostel girls experience as consumers. Rather than indicative of consumer power and liberation, hostel talk seemed to serve as a kind of emotional safety valve. Mixed with a rhetorical confidence of consumer power was

an attitude of caution and unstated fear, prompted by ever-present horror stories, about what would happen if one left the known space of the hostel and moved somewhere unknown. Although some girls took the plunge and moved away, many more girls that I knew would frequently consider their options for leaving but would end up resigning themselves to their current accommodation.

The limitations of hostel talk's liberatory potential, however, did not make the experience of hostel life any simpler. Girls still contended with troublesome relationships with their wardens, the staff working in the hostels and their fellow hostelmates, living at close confines with strangers of different languages, habits and behaviours and sharing space and daily routines. In the absence of viable alternatives for accommodation, hostel girls developed strategies for managing their bodily and spatial proximity to others and in maintaining a degree of privacy. The next chapter will describe some of the methods used by girls as they lived alongside one another and shared space in the hostel.

Chapter 3: “It is very difficult to share a room”: time, space and sharing in the hostel

Fahmida Girls’ Hostel was located on a quiet back street of Amber Town, a housing society in the south of Lahore. Behind an eight-foot fence, a three-floored brick building opens off a dilapidated courtyard surveilled by the red eye of a security camera. Ten separate bedrooms, all with attached washrooms, each contain between two and four single beds - as many as could be crammed in - accommodating in total as many as thirty-five girls. On the ground floor was the small kitchen and dingy dining room, where girls gathered three times a day; on the flat roof, accessible by a staircase, girls strolled at night. The warden, Miss Nazia, and her husband, Javed *bhai*, lived on the ground floor, in the front portion of the building in a self-contained flat. While Miss Nazia visited the hostel accommodation multiple times a day, bustling into the kitchen or conducting spot-checks on different rooms, Javed *bhai* hardly ever transgressed the invisible boundary between their flat and the hostel. The two male cooks, Rafiq *bhai* and Latif *bhai*, cooked, cleaned and carried out errands for the hostellites and for the warden, rising before anyone and going to bed last of all on mattresses they unrolled in the kitchen or the warden’s office. Every day, maids came from a nearby *basti* (informally constructed settlement) to clean the hostel. They laboured throughout the hottest part of the day while Miss Nazia periodically emerged from her air-conditioned office to shout instructions at them.

Fahmida Hostel was crosscut by two contradictory spatial logics. On the one hand, the hostel was a private business that Miss Nazia ran for profit, and within this logic it made sense to maximise income by accommodating as many girls as possible, packing as many beds into a room as could fit. Higher monthly rents were charged for rooms shared with

fewer people – rent for a 'three-seater' room was eleven thousand rupees a month per person, whereas a two-seater cost fifteen thousand per person. Multiple 'extras', such as meals, cups of tea and access to an air-conditioning unit, were all charged for individually, so that most aspects of hostel residence were quantifiable in monetary terms. Maximising the potential for profit of the hostel space meant that no private space was set aside for Rafiq and Latif as part of their accommodation. Every room was made available for commercial letting to hostel residents, and the cooks slept only in spaces that were ineligible for this purpose. Following this logic dictated that the more people packed into the same space, the better.

On the other hand, an opposing spatial logic constructed proximity to others as potentially dangerous. Concerns about proximity and pollution have been central to classical anthropological discourse on South Asia (Dumont 1970), and although many of the assumptions upon which this work was based have been criticised (e.g. Khare 2009), anxieties about sharing space with those constructed as 'Other' continue to manifest, often violently, in urban South Asia. Discourses of risk, centring around anxieties about gendered violence as well as women's unsurveilled sexual autonomy, inflect conversations about women's proximity to unrelated men (Parikh 2018; Phadke 2005; Zia 2017). Densely populated spaces were figured as problematic from this perspective, although attempts to regulate and maintain distance could only ever go so far within supposedly segregated spaces that rely on the labour of mistrusted others to function (Butt 2020; Cross 2010; Dickey 2000).

During my time in the hostel, I observed how the contradictory logics of exclusion and rentier profit maximisation were resolved through everyday spatial tactics (de Certeau 1988). Co-habitants of the hostel – the married landlord couple, their single, female tenants

and the working-class men who provided service to both – devised ways to live alongside each other, as well as with the warden's fear-provoking dogs and the security cameras that overshadowed the built environment. In tracing some of the tactics that I observed for sharing space, I want to caution against too sanguine a definition of the idea of 'sharing'. While the term is often used to connote harmonious and redistributive relationships (e.g. Vith et al. 2019), the sharing of space in the hostel was often grudging, involving enforced compromise and acquiescence to domination. In attending to the power inequalities involved in the negotiation of shared space, I find it useful to draw on Doreen Massey's (1994) concept of power-geometry, which she uses to criticise understandings of globalisation as universally characterised by time-space compression. Massey argues that such perspectives ignore highly unequal spatial distributions of power:

> … different social groups, and different individuals, are placed in very distinct ways in relation to the flows and interconnections [of time-space compression]. This point concerns not merely the issue of who moves and who doesn't, although that is an important element of it; it is also about power in relation to the flows and the movement. Different social groups have distinct relationships to this anyway differentiated mobility: some people are more in charge of it than others; some initiate flows and movement, others don't; some are more on the receiving-end of it than others; some are effectively imprisoned by it.
>
> (Massey 1994:149)

Attending to the power-geometry of the occupation of space in the hostel illuminates how the responsibility of sharing space is structured by gendered and classed inequalities and unequally shared across different kinds of bodies. While I particularly attend to spatial relationships of power, I am mindful of Massey's caution against separating out space from time, and her warning that such a view tends to configure space as a static, empty zone wherein things happen and time functions as 'the nodal point, the privileged signifier' (Massey 1994: 257). Therefore, in this chapter I seek to show how sharing occurs across the

hostel's daily rhythms, and draw on Sharma's (2014) work on power-chronography, a term she develops from Massey's power-geography to describe how temporal inequality inscribes social relations in capitalist societies. Thinking through Massey and Sharma's work enables an attention to relationships of dominance and subordination within the hostel, and how these patterns structure the way that different bodies manage proximity and occupy time and space.

In this chapter, I deliberately use the habitual past tense (would eat, would go). Like the ethnographic present tense, this grammatical device conveys a sense of homeostasis and consistency, running the risk of creating the impression of people living outside time (Fabian 1983). However, my intention in choosing this tense is to follow Anna Tsing in attempting to 'use tenses in a counter-intuitive style to disrupt problematic assumptions' (Tsing 1993: xv). By utilizing the habitual past tense, I aim to suggest the unending labour that continuously underwrites the work of living together and is distributed unequally across different kinds of bodies. Rather than a kind of classical, Newtonian physicist view of objects moving in orderly ways through empty space, responding to innate laws of gravitational force and repulsion, I use the habitual past to convey a kind of choreography predicated on the muscular tension of bodies that attend to their positioning in space to manage rhythm, distance and proximity to others. In this chapter, I aim to show how the appearance of homeostasis in the hostel does not signal an everyday peace characterised by the absence of conflict (Ring 2006). Rather, I suggest that the appearance of homeostasis depends on dense veins of labour that are unequally distributed across different kinds of bodies and personhoods.

Sharing space with the cooks: temporality, power-geometry and relational mobility

On a daily basis, the co-residents that we hostellites encountered more than anyone else were Rafiq and Latif, the two cooks, whose labour maintained the hostel and facilitated other residents' more easeful habitations of space and time. Cousins from a village in northern Punjab, tall, sombre-looking Rafiq, the elder of the two, was the chief cook, while the younger and mischievous-faced Latif assisted Rafiq in serving and clearing away the food and carried out errands for the hostel girls. While most of us were still sleeping, Rafiq would be making the breakfast for up to thirty-five girls, and at night Latif would be fetching cups of tea and food orders from the street on behalf of girls in their rooms. At mealtimes Latif would oscillate like a pendulum between the stationary bodies of the hostellites, who sat at the table waiting for the food to be placed before them, and the fixed body of Rafiq, who stood over a fierce gas flame and swiftly cooked roti after roti, his body tense with concentration. Their long days in the hostel were unpredictably filled with periods of emptiness and activity. Sometimes in the middle of the day Rafiq would play cricket in the street outside the hostel, or Latif would snatch a chance to sleep, head pillowed on his arms, at the dining table, but either could be called upon at any moment by a girl returning to the hostel and demanding food or tea, or by Miss Nazia with a task around the hostel.

Sara Sharma describes the relationships to time of workers like Rafiq and Latif as 'cab-lagged' because of their responsibility for 'servicing… privileged itineraries' (Sharma 2014:79). Like other workers that Sharma describes, Rafiq and Latif's daily and nightly labouring hours were predicated on the demands of other people whose itineraries were regarded as more important; to meet the latter's needs, Rafiq and Latif's duties were to 'clean, service, secure and maintain [the dominant temporal infrastructure]' (Sharma 2014:

80). Here I extend Sharma's argument by noting the degree to which these subordinated temporalities are relational. As sites for the accommodation of working women and students, hostel rhythms were clearly related to processes of labour and social reproduction. The opening hours of many hostels in the area, between seven o'clock in the morning and ten o'clock at night, was explicitly justified in terms of accommodating work patterns, while meal or 'mess times' attempted to cater for the needs of girls leaving or coming back from busy days at work. In my first months in the hostel, I was struck by the readiness with which hostellites called for Rafiq or Latif to bring tea to their rooms or to fetch items from outside the hostel, while they lay inert on their beds. When I mentioned that I myself felt embarrassed to make such requests, Zubeida was surprised. "This is their duty, this is what we are paying for!" she told me forthrightly. From Zubeida's perspective, it was important to receive the value of the labour for which she was paying, and it was Rafiq and Latif's duty to provide it. A few months later, however, when I visited Tabassum, Rabieh and Rukhsana at the hospital in which they worked, I noticed that in this environment their temporalities were themselves subordinated and 'cab-lagged'. At the hospital they were perpetually on the move, responding immediately to the commands of the head doctor. None of them sat down over the course of several hours, and their bodies were constantly labouring. Back in the hostel, their slumped bodies were testament to the conditional rest that they were able to access as customers there, while Rafiq and Latif were called into action to serve their stationary, resting bodies.

The intersection of activity, rest and class invites a consideration of the degree to which mobility is inherently liberatory. Women's access to public space and existence outside conditions of *purdah*, or seclusion (Papanek & Minault 1982), has been constructed as central

to national progress and liberation since the era before Partition and Independence, when Muhammad Jinnah declared that, as a progressive Muslim leader, he would routinely:

> ….take my sister along with me to backward areas like Balochistan and NWFP and she also attends the sessions of the All-India Muslim League and other public meetings. Pakistan will be a progressive country in the building of which women will be seen working shoulder to shoulder with men in every department of life.
>
> (Grünenfelder 2013:70)

In the era immediately following Independence many middle- and upper-class women were active in the public sphere as social workers and organisers (Grünenfelder 2013; Ansari & Gould 2020), while a vibrant feminist movement emerged in the 1970s in response to the dictatorship of General Zia and the Hudood reforms that threatened to restrict women to within *chador aur char divari,* the veil and four walls (Mumtaz & Shaheed 1987). Contemporary feminist activity in Pakistan, as well as across South Asia, has continued to highlight mobility outside the domestic sphere as a key feminist issue, with movements like the Aurat March, Girls at Dhabas and the Why Loiter movement centring around women's access to public space (Phadke et al. 2011; Khawar 2018). Without disregarding the importance of these movements, I want to note that foregrounding mobility as central to autonomy and freedom assumes that mobility is chosen, rather than compelled. While mobility is often accompanied by a discourse of liberation, thinking through the frame of power-geometry allows us to consider who moves, and under what circumstances. Kaufmann's characterisation of motility as 'the capacity of a person to be mobile' (Kaufmann 2016) offers nuance in highlighting how mobility itself is enabled and foreclosed by institutional and infrastructural arrangements, and how it is both made a possibility and an obligation on different kinds of bodies by their relationship to leisure, work, public and private space. The mobility of Rafiq and Latif across the space of Fahmida

Hostel was engendered by their service to hostel girls, whose immobility within the hostel indicated respite rather than restriction. Thus, the motility of differently classed and gendered bodies expressed hierarchical access to the ability to rest.

Sharing space with the cooks: intimacy, danger and stigma management

Daily proximity in the hostel, as Rafiq and Latif cooked and served us food, fostered an intimacy that led to the sharing of very human moments. Latif would often lug heavy items about the hostel as girls moved in and out, and once, when I saw him carrying a bulky suitcase downstairs, he caught my eye, grinned self-consciously and mimed throwing the heavy bag over the railing to the ground floor. Another time, when he was cleaning out a vacated room, he suddenly did a forward roll across the beds before smiling sheepishly at me. Sometimes, while he was cooking, Rafiq would argue politics with two ardent PTI supporters, Hena and Neelofar – he would come out of the kitchen to lean on the dining table, arguing back staunchly in defence of the previous prime minister, Nawaz Sharif. Such moments, however, were fleeting. When other girls came into the dining room, the conversation would abruptly subside; Neelofar and Hena would stop their discussion and Rafiq would retreat to the kitchen. Similarly, the moments of humour I experienced with Latif were brief, and I always felt immediately conscious of a need to be on my dignity with him afterwards in case my laughter should be construed as flirtatious.

My concern about being perceived as flirtatious was mediated by an ever-present discourse about the vulnerability to sexual violence of women and girls outside the domestic sphere (Bernroider 2018; Krishnan 2022; Parikh 2018). Stories were recounted of hostel girls being perceived as ‘easy’ and followed home, propositioned or harassed, and I was warned by Miss Nazia not to tell strangers that I was staying in a hostel, but that I was living

with family. Although the horror stories (Gamburd 2000) told by hostel girls included authority figures such as professors, employers and senior colleagues, discourses about gendered danger habitually centre on an abject male other posing a threat to a normatively middle-class woman (Dey 2018; Ewing 2008; Pilot & Prabhu 2012; Shandilya 2015). Both middle-class hostel girls and working-class hostel employees are figured as threats to the social order and perform different kinds of impression management to counteract the stigma that they 'give off' (Goffman 1968).

Feminist scholars have noted the constant and invisible safety work (Vera-Gray & Kelly 2020) carried out by women in order to mitigate their exposure to sexual harassment. Rather than simplistically assuming a commonality of experience based on a presumed gendered universality, however, attending to the manifestation of safety work in different contexts enables understanding of how different kinds of classed, casted and gendered bodies both experience and mitigate threat in embodied ways. In my fieldwork I saw Rafiq and Latif performing distinctive forms of safety work in order to dispel the impression that they might present a sexualised danger to the hostel residents. Although they roamed over all parts of the hostel in their working hours, fetching and carrying, carrying out repairs and delivering messages, they occupied space in a submissive and deferential way. When delivering a message, Rafiq would knock on a door and then move several paces back, out of proximity to the girl standing in the threshold; if the door stood open, he would stand at a marked distance and call loudly through it, avoiding the appearance of any interest in what was going on in the room. If either Latif or Rafiq encountered one of us hostel girls on the narrow first-floor walkway or on the stairs, where some proximity was inevitable, they would back away quickly to allow us to pass with protective space around us. They took pains to place plates and cups on a surface from which we could lift them, rather than

putting them directly into our hands. Through these actions, Rafiq and Latif disavowed the impression of potential sexual interest or threat (Chopra 2006; Staples 1986).

Hostel girls, on the other hand, drew on a classed dynamic (Hai 2004) to avoid the appearance of sexual interest. Sitting at the table with their gaze firmly fixed on their plates, they would call imperiously for food without making eye contact. While outside of the hostel most of the hostel girls would wear *abaya* and *niqab* (a fully-covering robe and veil over the lower part of the face) to negotiate public space shared with strangers, inside the hostel girls would frequently come to the table without a dupatta covering their heads, and some would even wear short-sleeved pyjamas. Clothes that would have been considered over-revealing in front of men of equal status here delineated the lack of concern that girls felt for the gaze of Rafiq and Latif, who were not figured as potential threats (Ring 2006). Even the fictive kinship terms that the hostellites and cooks used for each other – *Baji* (elder sister) and *Bhai* or *Bhaiyya* (brother) respectively – affirmed a class hierarchy. The age and status difference implied in the term *Baji* continued to affirm an inequality between working-class and middle-class hostellite girls, while also normalising proximity through familial terms.

Human and nonhuman surveillants: supervision, resistance and security theatre

Alongside their other duties in the hostel, the cooks were responsible for maintaining oversight of the hostel residents. In this they formed part of a surveillant assemblage (Haggerty & Ericson 2000) comprised of human and nonhuman agents. Other actors within this assemblage included the red-eyed security cameras that blinked from the corners, the sheer walls that created zones of hyper-visibility and the identity documents that Miss Nazia photocopied and filed in her office along with the telephone numbers of girls' fathers.

Together, this assemblage manifested a generalised anxiety about what girls might do without supervision. Malalai, who had moved into hostel accommodation only recently, drew on her experience of living with family in describing how girls' residence in hostels was imagined as problematic:

> There is worry that hostel girls don't have limitations placed on them… …Here [in the hostel] we don't have any restrictions on us. We can come and go at any time, come back any time. Someone is going outside - where she's going, we don't know. The situation of a girl at home with her parents and a girl living in a hostel is very different. At home, parents know everything about their daughter's friends, her *outgoings*, where she is going. Parents can tell her and guide her what is good and bad; they can keep a check on her. In a hostel, parents don't get the chance to tell her what is good or bad; she will only know what her friends will tell her. She is free to go where and when she wants; her friends may misguide her. She also may get to know boys, and the intentions of boys are not always sincere.

In Malalai's summary of the worries attached to hostel life, the problem of ignorance – of not knowing – appeared frequently. The girl living in a hostel was constructed as vulnerable in her ignorance of right and wrong, in need of guidance that was not available. In addition, the movements of girls in and out of the hostel and the intentions of male and female friends were imagined as opaque, impossible to divine, and suspicious in their impenetrability. Surveillance as a system of focused observance and information-gathering for the purpose of control (Dubrofsky & Magnet 2015) sought to render these anxiety-provoking opacities transparent (Hall 2015). However, as Arora argues, in doing so, surveillant agents do not simply form the material conditions or the moorings to human action, but become co-constituents of mobility and containment, forming an 'immanent assemblage' of hybrid systems (Arora 2014). Surveillant agents within the hostel were not a neutral backdrop to different kinds of mobility – they were co-residents, affecting how others occupied space and responded to their presence.

The cameras positioned around the hostel exerted a visible influence on the way that others occupied space. The cameras were not hidden, but prominently positioned and pointed out with pride by the warden when she showed visitors around. Girls moving around the hostel were aware of their presence, and inhabited space around the cameras in ways that suggested efforts to maintain some opacity. In the lounge, girls sitting on the sofa would turn themselves to an awkward position, folding their legs up underneath them and bracing themselves against the low arm, in order to turn their backs to the camera. When standing on the roof, girls would drift to stand on either side of the centrally-positioned camera, out of its sight. Rafiq and Latif, although employed to keep watch upon the hostel girls, were also under surveillance as employees by the warden herself and adjusted their own behaviour accordingly in anticipation of her gaze (Foucault & Sheridan 1995). For example, when Tabassum asked Rafiq to deliver a portion of food to Malalai's room, he gestured apologetically to the camera in the corner.

"I cannot, *Baji*. *Baji* Nazia has told me not to let anyone eat in their room. The camera will see."

"*Bhai*, please, this is a sick child!" Tabassum implored. "What about humanity?"

"The camera will see. Don't be angry with me, *Baji*."

"I am not angry," Tabassum said, but she looked and sounded frustrated.

While Foucault (1995) describes surveillance as a productive technology of government, creating docile bodies that behave as if they are always under surveillance, Johnson et al (2020) detail how those placed under surveillance can chafe against the indignity of being watched and find limited ways to resist. In my research, I found that what hostel girls understood to be the motivation for surveillance influenced their response to it.

While the cameras' presence was often experienced as oppressive, circumscribing girls' movement around the hostel in their consciousness of their constant gaze (Krishnan 2019b), girls were particularly resentful of forms of oversight that seemed to be motivated by a desire to extract payment for services. For example, girls were not allowed to make tea for themselves – they were required to ask Rafiq to make it for them, and cups would be added to their monthly rent charges. Samayya had secretly brought a kind of electric rod that could be used to heat water, and she kept this wrapped up in cloth at the bottom of a drawer, out of sight of the warden or the cooks as they moved through the hostel. Electric heaters were also banned in the hostel, but some girls smuggled them in in an obscuring bag, out of sight of the camera's gaze. When Tabassum was reproved for having a fan heater in her room, she was sure that Latif had spied it and carried word to the warden. "He is her little spoon, her *chamcha*, roaming around, spying on us," she said angrily.

Surveillance, however, was not always characterised as unwelcome. When Tabassum told an anxious Malalai, fearful of being alone, "Do not worry – no one can get in, there are cameras everywhere. Trust in God and in the security cameras," she invoked the cameras as a protective force against Malalai's presumed vulnerability, imagining surveillance as a benignant force of care. At other times, the all-seeing eye of the cameras was invoked as an impartial authority, to which claims for justice could be made. When an argument arose between Rabieh and Rukhsana on the one hand, and Rafiq on the other, Rafiq appealed to the warden: "*Baji*, check the camera please, you will see. Please check the camera." Here, Rafiq constructed the cameras as a witness beyond bias that could evidence his innocence. Here I find Arora's characterisation of the immanent assemblages found in carceral settings as 'hybrid programs... that cannot be consigned to the apparatus of colonial domination or of anti-colonial resistance' (Arora 2014: 9) helpful. As co-habitants of the space of the hostel,

the cameras, like the cooks, become imbricated in complex relationships of power and control, sometimes avoided by co-residents and at other times drawn upon as allies.

It is also important to recognise the limitations in the cameras' workings. Much writing on surveillance seems to presume an all-powerful, omniscient gaze that is impossible to escape, and to which resistance can only ever be minor (Dubrofsky & Magnet 2015; Hall 2015). In the hostel, cameras were far from a panoptic presence. They left much of the hostel unregarded in ways that were obvious and were easy to get around. Girls standing on the roof, for example, could easily be out of sight simply by standing on either side of the centrally positioned camera and be safely out of sight. At night, when visibility was lower, occupation of the rooftop area was much less constricted as girls' movements across the roof expanded to fill the whole space, moving in and out of the camera's line of sight with impunity. Furthermore, it was unclear how much attention was actually paid to the camera feed. When Malalai went to the warden's office, she reported that Miss Nazia was staring over her shoulder the whole time at the camera feed - "This place is like Big Boss," she said disgustedly. However, another night the warden knocked on my door in a panic because she thought I had not returned. "Did you not see me come back on the camera?" I asked curiously. She started: "Oh, I did not think of that!"

Here, the surveillant assemblage acting across the hostel appeared more performative than actual, a form of security theatre (Schneier 2003). The cameras' presence was presented to parents as evidence of their daughters' safety in this hostel, a manifestation of care that projected the impression of security and control without enacting it.

"It is very difficult to share a room:" Sharing space in the hostel with other girls

While describing how different kinds of co-residents share the hostel space, I want to avoid giving the impression that within these identity categories relationships were harmonious and internally consistent. Girls living in the hostel were not united in solidarity against the cooks, the dogs or the security cameras. Rather, relationships between girls themselves were often difficult, full of tension and lacking in trust. As Hamida suggested in the last chapter, the stigma attached to the figure of the hostel girl as a woman outside the family sphere meant that she was imagined as morally polluting or potentially threatening to the reputations and moralities of 'good' girls. Some girls also talked about proximity to other girls as affectively injurious, raising the possibility of experiencing rejection, coldness or unkindness. I noticed this first when talking with Malalai and Tabassum, when Malalai was saying, rather forlornly, that she had very few friends in her class, apart from Samayya:

> In my class of twenty girls, only three were from Lahore. The rest are from the villages and live in hostels. They are unfriendly, they behave coldly. They turn away and do not greet you or talk to you. They say, 'I don't talk to her because she doesn't talk to me.' They notice every mistake you make, they comment on everything. You can't trust them.

Tabassum's response to Malalai was compassionate to her sense of injury but not over-sympathetic. Instead, she adocated that Malalai manage her expectations:

> I lived in hostels for five years; I had best friends there. We are not in contact now - one has this job; one has gone away. Almost all of them are married now. My best friend has a baby. That's what happens. You should have no expectations from a relationship. Girls make relationships too fast and then the quarrel - one complains that the other shut the cupboard door while she was trying to sleep. It's better to have distance; not to expect too much.

Tabassum's advice to Malalai encompasses the theme that I want to explore in describing how hostel girls managed to live together. Despite anxieties about proximity to unknown others, sharing space with strangers was accepted as a fact of life in hostel residence. Single rooms in private hostels were scarce and expensive. It was normal for as

many beds as possible to be fitted into a room in order to maximise the potential revenue for the space, and most girls spent time living in a room with at least one other girl, and sometimes as many as seven others. In my fieldwork I found that young women living outside the family home developed a range of strategies for managing proximity, maintaining distance and safeguarding areas of non-surveillance.

A kind of reticence characterised relationships between girls living in the same hostel. At the dining table, girls would sit together in complete silence, staring at their phones while eating and never making eye contact. In the evening, as girls walked back and forth across the roof for exercise, they would veer out of each other's paths without verbal acknowledgement of each other, like mutually-repelling magnetised objects. In my first few months in the hostel, I felt continually baffled by the polite refusal of most girls to engage in conversations that, as a conscientious anthropologist, I eagerly tried to initiate. If I approached girls walking on the roof, I would watch in guilt as they left after a few polite words, feeling I had chased them away from one of the only spaces in the hostel for leisure.

When sharing a room with others, material objects could be made into physical barriers for privacy. When Kashaf moved into the neighbouring room to me, she was downscaling from her previous accommodation at the University of Lahore. Three thousand girls lived there, she told me:

"On my floor there were one hundred and twenty-eight girls, thirty-two rooms of four, and six washrooms. The washrooms were always in a bad state. That's why I moved to a private hostel. Private hostels are better – the rooms have an attached washroom and there are only three girls in a room.

"Over there, when you had to share with other girls, that could be difficult. If one girl wanted to talk on the phone until late or wanted to keep the light on to work or read, you could do nothing about it. You just had to bear it."

"Could you not ask her to switch off the light?" I asked.

"You couldn't ask her because she will say no. If she is a nice girl she might do it, but she probably won't. It will make a bad feeling."

"So how did you bear it?"

"I would just pull the blanket over my head and try to sleep. Some girls were in bunk beds, they would use a sheet to make a small room for themselves."

Kashaf's recollection of girls who used the architecture of the bunk beds they slept in to make zones of non-visibility behind improvised curtains highlighted a consistent theme across different accounts - strategies that often seemed to involve not being observed. Rather than trying to avoid controlling observation by authorities, the girls that I knew seemed to be seeking refuge from the experience of being observed by anyone at all. Zeyneb, who had shared a room with a double bed in a previous hostel, found ways of maintaining bodily distance even within the same bed: "We would put pillows down the middle of the bed when we went to sleep, and lie with our backs to each other" (see Fig. 2). When Tabassum and I shared a room, I could always tell when she was feeling sociable, because the cushions would be stacked behind her so that she sat up in bed, leaning back on the pillows and facing me. When she wanted privacy, she would place them at right angles, one against the headboard and one between my bed and hers like a screen, behind which she would lie obscured from my sight (see Fig. 3). At other times, she would pull her blanket

above her head, making a kind of cave in which she was invisible; a few months into sharing a room, I found myself doing this too.

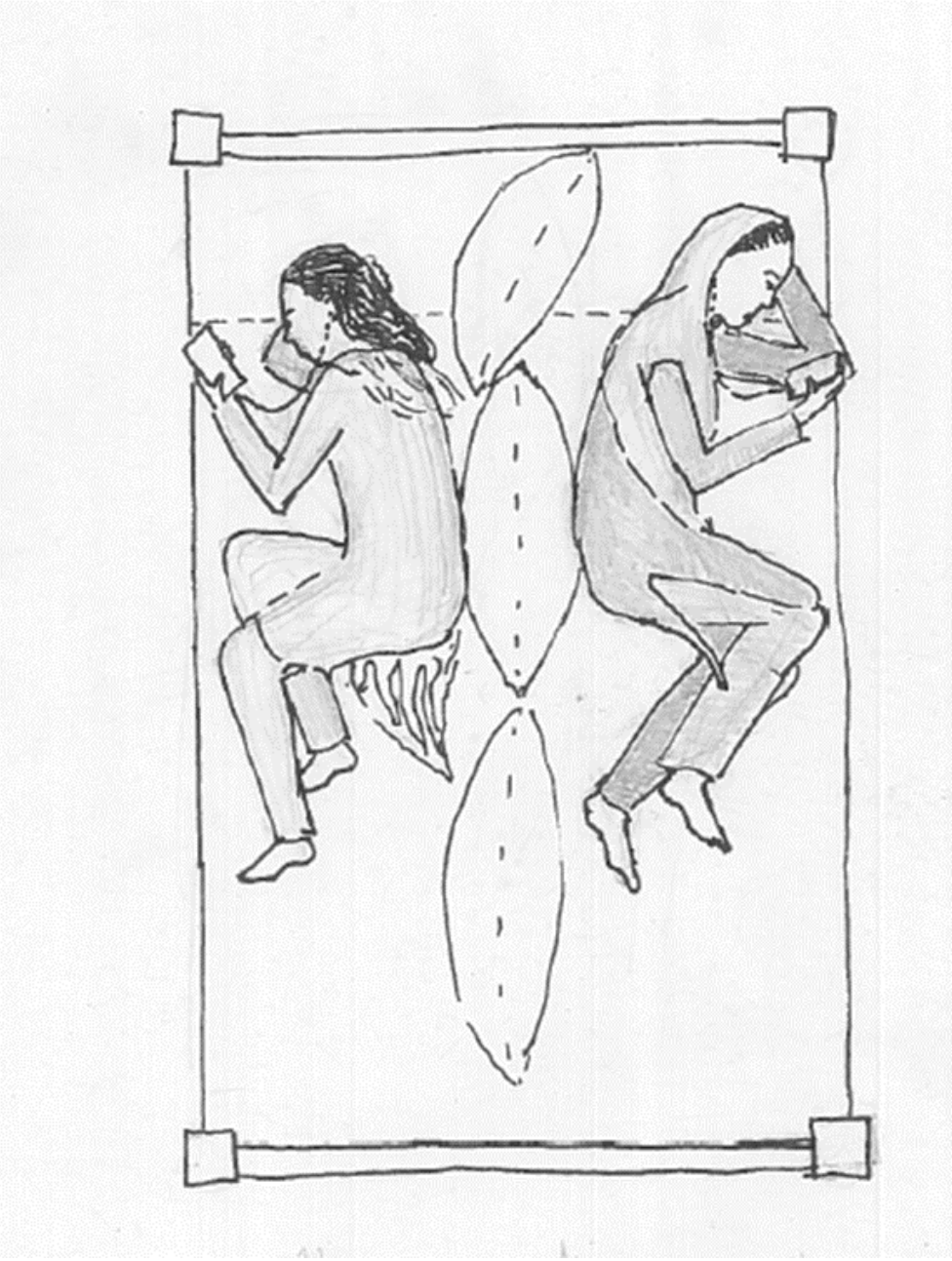


Figure 2: Zeyneb and her roommate sharing a bed.

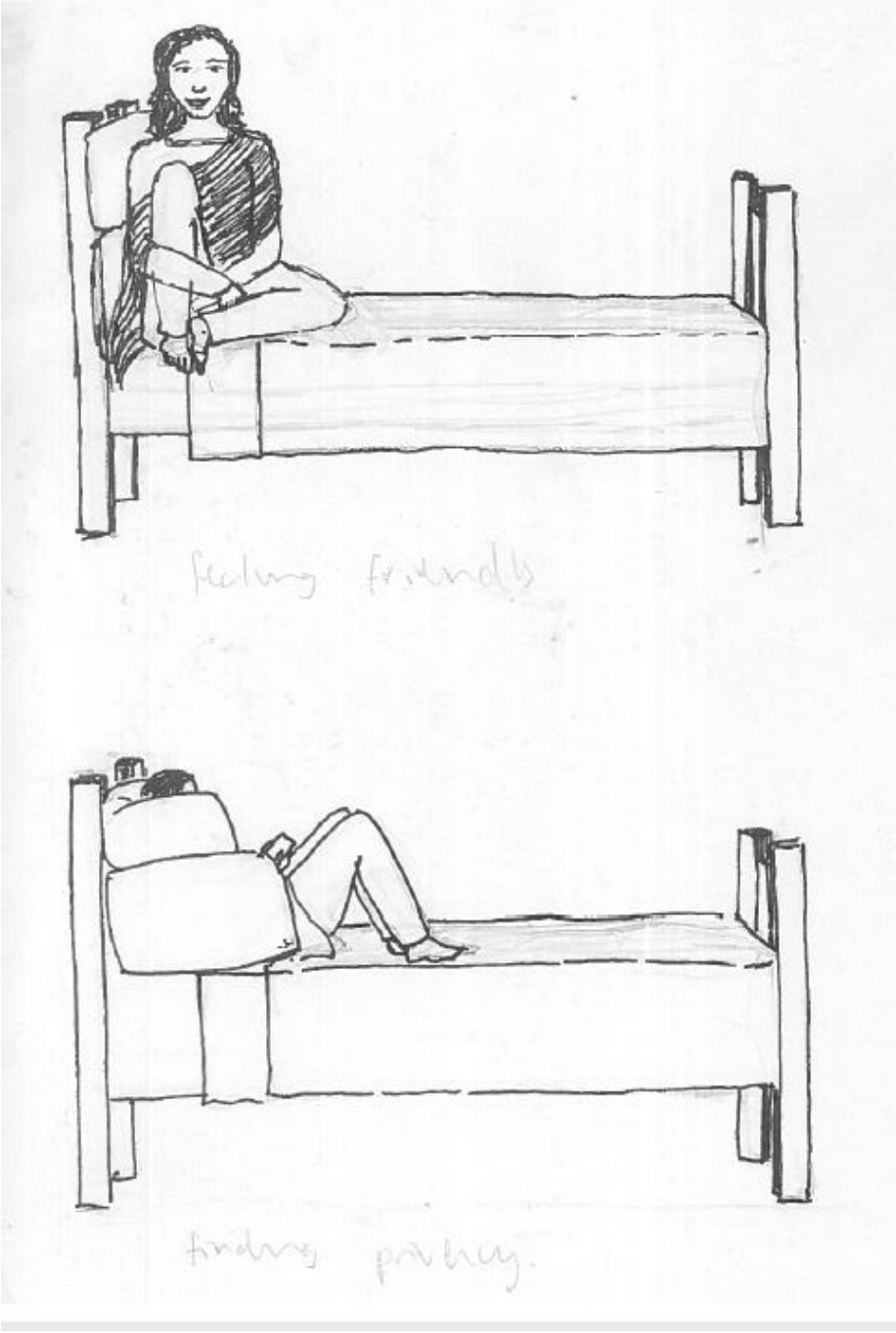


Figure 3: Tabassum using pillows to obtain privacy or socialibility

A burst pipe in my room in January 2020, which forced me to move temporarily into Gauria's three-seater room, gave me sight of another spatial strategy for maintaining distance. Gauria's bed was against the far wall of the room from the door, and she had

carefully curated the space around her so that she barely had to interact with any of the girls that shared her room for shorter or longer periods of time. She had stretched an extension cable across the room from the only plug point near the door so that she could charge her phone and her laptop without coming close to either of the other beds. Her laptop sat at the head of the bed, and her rucksack, pencil case and purse lay at the foot. On one side of the pillow was a full bottle of water, while her phone lay on the other side of the pillow with her headphones draped over the headboard. At the foot of the bed was a small folding table with a bowl of fruit, a stack of plastic plates and food storage boxes, and a metal flask. Gauria hardly needed to stir from her bed to access anything she needed, without interacting with either of her roommates.

Over time, intimacy often grew between roommates so that the need to 'keep distance' was not as intense. Girls sharing rooms sometimes developed close friendships based on intimate proximity, always moving around the hostel together, holding hands and sharing clothes and possessions. In contrast to Gauria, Zakiya and Samayya, who had shared a room for four years, kept their phones charging together on a table, bought food to share without reckoning what belonged to whom, and crossed their shared room multiple times a day without following any path. However, the intimacy between roommates could become a tactic for maintaining distance from others. Girls eating in the hostel usually sat with their roommates and spoke exclusively to them, and girls moving into rooms already occupied might be excluded from the friendship between the other roommates for some time. The intimacy between a smaller sub-group of hostellites worked to maintain distance from others, creating a kind of friendship that was exclusionary.

Even within intimate friendships of cohabiting roommates, there was an acknowledgement that sharing space could be difficult, and involved compromise, even by

roommates who were very good friends. Even Zakiya, who had shared a room with Samayya for many years, acknowledged phlegmatically that: “It’s very difficult to share a room - it is not easy even to share a washroom with your best friend, and it is very difficult to share with a stranger.” This acknowledgement recalls the generalised observation, often trotted out as a trite example of cultural relativism, that ‘the concept of privacy doesn’t exist in Indian culture’ (Trehan 2009) or that ‘few Pakistanis value privacy the way that Westerners do’ (Mohiuddin 2007:331). Following Massey’s power-geometry, we might better think about who is able to access privacy, who might desire or fear it, and about the situations in which privacy might be sought or avoided.

When sharing a room with other hostellites, a mobile phone with ‘hands-free’ earbuds was one of the most common ways of obtaining privacy. In communal spaces like the dining room and on the roof, girls would have headphones in and would be regarding the small screen of their phone, while in their rooms at night, once the main light was turned off, phone screens would illuminate individual faces in a rather spectral way as the girls lay in the dark. Girls listened to music, sermons uploaded onto YouTube or Qur’anic recitation; often they watched videos or played games. Thinking again through Massey’s framework of power-geometry, however, helps us to note not only how different people sought out and managed privacy, but how their relationship to privacy was conditioned by expectations and their environment. Some girls were expected to use tracking apps through which their parents could monitor their movements; one girl received long and repetitive calls from her fiancé that she could not refuse, although she repeatedly asked him to end the call so that she could sleep. Although going to the city has traditionally meant more freedom and less observation than in the family home, the spread of digital technology means that girls can be more surveilled.

Sharing space with the dogs: nonhuman intimacy as social proxy

Given that 'social life is always "more-than-human"' (Braun 2005:635), life in the city frequently involves sharing space with nonhuman animals (Haraway 2016; Mathur 2021; Rademacher & Sivaramakrishnan 2017). Hostel co-residents included mosquitoes, lizards, cockroaches and feral cats that ranged over the high boundaries of neighbouring buildings without regard for borders of ownership or residence. Attempts at 'beastly/human spatial partitioning' (Mathur 2021) within the hostel were half-hearted, involving periodic violence – a shoe thrown at a lizard or brought down heavily upon a cockroach, hands smashed together to crushing a whining mosquito – when proximity became too intense. But one set of nonhuman coresidents, the two guard dogs of the hostel Maxie and Rover, inhabited the hostel in a somewhat different way to any of the other residents, in a way that needs to be understood through the logic of nonhuman animals being counted as property, as financially valuable and according to a different reckoning of worth than human coresidents.

Kavesh notes that dogs in most parts of Pakistan experience 'contradictory forms of care: sometimes they are loved, petted, and even cuddled, but for most of the time, they are kicked, beaten with sticks, and victims of abuse' (Kavesh 2019:232). The location within the hostel of the adult Maxie and her puppy Rover, in a concreted enclosure by the front gate, meant that they were positioned as guard dogs, keeping watch over the hostel and raising an alert whenever anyone entered. Their presence had an affective impact on many of the hostel residents. Even Miss Nazia, whose dogs they were, seemed frightened of them, and the hostel girls scuttled past the enclosure as swiftly as they could, regarding the dogs not only as fearful in their size and imagined ferocity, but as religiously polluting. A number of girls liked to take their prayer mat to the roof and pray in the open air. Periodically, however,

Maxie and Rover would be let loose for exercise within the hostel, and they would charge up the stairs to run about on the roof. As they bounded through the hostel, they ricocheted like pinballs off the boundary walls and sent the bodies of humans sharing the space within the boundaries scampering away, retreating to behind closed doors. The urine and faeces that were left behind, as material traces of the dogs' presence, continued to exert a repulsing effect on how girls would occupy the space of the hostel. No longer able to spread a prayer mat on ground that was religiously unclean, girls would avoid large swathes of space on the roof and in the hostel courtyard, picking their way gingerly along by the walls. Although girls complained about this to each other, they seemed resigned to it, perhaps feeling that there was no point in complaining to the warden since their claim to space would be considered less important than the valuable dogs.

My interactions with Maxie and Rover were extremely limited, and I cannot provide a thick, multispecies ethnography that takes their agency as nonhuman animals seriously. However, what I would like to suggest is the possibility that the dogs offer as a proxy for elucidating some of the intra-human hierarchies within the hostel. As Kavesh notes, keeping dogs as pets is associated with social mobility and 'newly emerging middle-class sensibilities' (2019: 232) in Punjabi cities, and Miss Nazia's ownership of Maxie and Rover can be understood as a form of urban, middle-class identity performance, contrasting with a 'backwards' mentality of fearfulness towards dogs; some of the hostel girls, in retaliation, presented their avoidance of the dogs as motivated by the desire to maintain ritual purity, and as evidence of their superior religiosity to the warden. When talking about Maxie, Miss Nazia would dwell on her avowed status as a purebred and therefore valuable dog, with the capacity to birth further valuable puppies. These qualities offered evidence of Miss Nazia's wealth, through her capacity to own a financially valuable animal.

However, Miss Nazia seemed to have little to do with the dogs on a daily basis. Rafiq and Latif, already charged with feeding and safeguarding around thirty hostel girls, were the ones responsible for feeding Maxie and Rover every day, hosing out their foul-smelling cage once a week, and occasionally taking them for a walk through the streets at night. Neither Latif nor Rafiq seemed any fonder of the dogs than anyone else in the hostel – the large, well-fed dogs were more than half of the diminutive Latif's size, and I saw both leaping back in alarm from the dogs' open jaws and long, powerful limbs - and this dynamic offers a potential explanation to the puzzle of the dogs' occasional freedom to roam within the walls of the hostel. Although it was a fearful experience for the hostel girls to have the dogs loose within the hostel confines, for Rafiq and Latif it offered respite from one of the tasks on their unending list of chores. Letting the dogs loose perhaps also offered a quiet form of resistance to the demands made upon the cooks by the hostel girls; the resting bodies of the girls would suddenly stiffen with fear and explode into movement as they escaped the open spaces of the hostel into their rooms, leaving the dogs to run joyfully over the roof, walkways, stairs and courtyard, and perhaps allowing Rafiq and Latif to gain some time without demands being made of them.

The warden: at home in the hostel

Javed *bhai* and Miss Nazia, the married couple with landlord roles in Fahmida Hostel, lived in a self-contained flat at the front of the hostel, but moved across the space in distinctly different ways. Javed *bhai* was hardly ever seen in the hostel part of the building; he stayed firmly within his living portion, occupying a fixed area based on gendered spatial separation (Jeffery 1979; Ring 2006). Only when hostellites' fathers or male relatives came

to the hostel would he act as an authority, meeting the visitors in the office while Miss Nazia remained out of sight. Although he was little engaged in the day-to-day work of running the hostel, girls paying their rent by bank transfer paid it into his account. In the hostel he appeared less visibly an authority figure than Miss Nazia, who was front and centre in the management and discipline of the hostel, but his immobility could also be understood as symptomatic of a classed and gendered privilege, where he commanded the profit based on his wife's labour.

Conversely, Miss Nazia crossed the boundary between the front and back of the hostel routinely, appearing in the dining room with a flashing smile and an effusive greeting to the hostel girls, or whirling into their rooms to return a nail varnish. She spoke warmly and caressingly to the girls, joking with them and presenting herself as an elder sister – indeed, most of the girls called her *Baji* or *Api*, respectful names for an older sister. Her adoption of a hostel warden job, she told me, flowed from her naturalised feminine proclivity to feed, care for and nurture others. "I love to see these girls coming to me with their problems – I feel that you are all my daughters, my younger sisters, and I love to take care of you." As she moved fluidly over the entire space of the hostel, including into supposedly locked rooms, she harvested rental payments and oversaw girls' locations and behaviours.

It would be easy to presume that Miss Nazia was in control within the space of Fahmida Hostel from her movements. She moved easily and apparently freely around the hostel, often into girls' rooms and private areas into which no one else gained access, and did not seem to be spatially limited as others in the hostel were. However, I argue that her apparent freedom marked a different kind of compulsion, which was the need to be constantly on, active and productive. In addition to running the hostel, Miss Nazia taught science at a private girls' college; she had also set up a fast-food café and had a cake-making business. These latter

activities, as she presented them, were her hobbies, things that she enjoyed doing and actively got energy and recuperation from. In her estimation, they hardly counted as work at all: "I am an artistic person, so when I come home I can relax by baking. I make cakes for weddings, birthdays – it's not like work to me, it is something I do to enjoy", and "I love to be busy – for me it's fun to plan menus and design, to do cooking. For me it's not tiring, it gives me energy!" It was striking that many of the activities that structured her perpetual busy-ness were highly gendered, incorporating activities of feeding, care and nurture. Nazia linked three sources of income – the hostel, the cake-baking business and the café – to her innate capacities of motherliness, creativity and energy. In her reckoning, her naturalised impulses, which were naturalised as innate to her gendered self, all became monetisable, so that distinction between labour and rest, home and workplace, seemed to collapse.

Rather than assuming that Miss Nazia's occupation of space was a natural consequence of her position within the hostel, we might better see it as a performance and intentional claim to purposefulness, legitimacy and value. Part of my reason for thinking so were the hints that Miss Nazia offered about her involuntarily childless status. She had been married for several years and had had two miscarriages, as well as painful and unsuccessful fertility treatment that, she mourned, had thickened her formerly slender figure and aged her appearance. There were rumours that her mother-in-law was looking for a second wife for Javed *bhai*. Miss Nazia's outgoing and engaging persona and confident appropriation of the hostel space demonstrated her value as a partner and contested attempts to replace her, but did so at the expense of her ability to rest and perhaps her freedom to grieve her own losses.

Conclusion

Sharing space within a hostel is not easy or automatic. Rather, it depends on multiple calculations, tensions and enforced acts of compromise. In her landmark study of an apartment block in Karachi, Laura Ring (2006) shows how women's daily work of relationship maintenance facilitates an everyday peace that enables neighbours to carry on living together. While Ring is particularly interested in the way that gendered experiences of emotional tension enable relationships across ethnic and class difference, in this chapter I have drawn attention to the practices of different actors – the cooks, the dogs, hostel girls and landlords – in order to show how the work of living together is spread unequally across different kinds of classed and gendered bodies. By doing so, I also nuance Lave and Wenger's concept of communities of learning. Lave and Wenger emphasise that participation in a social group offers opportunities for learning and identity construction, but as this chapter shows, such communities do not necessarily have to be internally homogeneous but can be comprised of diverse actors whose contributions are distinctly different. Furthermore, this chapter shows that communities of learning are not always harmonious, based on the sharing of knowledge as a universally-recognised good. Rather, learning can be acquired through participation in a community characterised by mistrust and the fear of other members, as the next chapter explores.

Chapter 4: ‘Trust in God and the security cameras’: personal responsibility, care for the self and the human-divine relationship

“You should never, ever trust the warden,” Tabassum whispered in the dark.

It was August 2019, and Tabassum had invited me and Malalai, who had just moved into our hostel, to her family’s home for the Eid-ul-Adha holiday. I had accepted gladly but had planned to return to Lahore early in order to continue with fieldwork. We had just learned, however, that Miss Nazia had gone away without warning, and that we were locked out until she came back.

Although I was outraged by what I considered Miss Nazia’s unreliability, the others were phlegmatic. “You can’t trust anyone in this country,” Tabassum’s mother sighed philosophically, while Malalai nodded earnestly in agreement. They, in turn, seemed surprised by my reaction. Tabassum warned me gently: “Do not trust the warden. She is nice to your face, but she is looking out for herself.”

“People here will say such things, they will say what they want you to believe, but you shouldn’t believe it,” Tabassum explained as we lay in the dark. Malalai was sleeping and she spoke quietly so as not to wake her, the lowered tone increasing the impact of what she was telling me. “The only one you can put your faith in is Allah.”

* * *

This chapter explores the discourses of personal responsibility that I encountered among hostel girls during my fieldwork. While some of these discourses bore similarity to understandings of individual responsibilisation under neoliberalism (Foucault et al. 2020; Gill

& Orgad 2022; Gill & Scharff 2011; Rose 1996), I argue for the need to examine how understandings of personal responsibility operate in cultural and social contexts. In Pakistan, a nation founded in 1947 as a self-proclaimed home for Muslims, discourses of individual responsibility and the need to 'strive' (Khan 2012) are bound up in histories of Islamic reform and the understandings of self-reliance as a religious duty owed to God. These formulations take on a specifically gendered edge in what is considered one of the most dangerous countries for women in the world (Thomas Reuters Foundation 2018). For non-elite migrant women living in private hostels in Lahore, aware of their own gendered and classed precarity, practices of self-care become a form of personal boundary maintenance, minimising their vulnerability to gendered violence in response to a sense of perpetual menace from malevolent others. Here, I want to differentiate my observations from scholarly depictions of self-care as either a depoliticizing trend towards neoliberal subjectivation or a radically transformative behaviour that 'is always already ethically bound up with the principle and practice of justice' (Ford-Smith & Hanson 2022:42). While the boundary maintenance practices of hostel girls aim at individual risk management rather than wholesale social transformation, the visceral sense of danger under which hostel residents recited these imperatives differentiates them from a facile politics of 'feeling good' through self-optimisation (Elias et al. 2017). Self-care, as practised in Fahmida Hostel, was cautious, guarded and, like Audre Lorde, concerned with self-preservation (Lorde, 1988, p. 125). Rather than 'an act of political warfare', however, the self-preservation of the women that I knew normalised, rather than challenged, patriarchal norms, mediating a tension between self-care as resistance and as survival.

In working through the way that care for the self was lived as a practice of generalised mistrust, I also consider a competing and apparently contradictory discourse of total trust in

one being – God. In the entirely Muslim population of Fahmida Hostel, faith in Allah as the one true God and the supreme example of power, knowledge and benevolence was not only ubiquitously accepted, but actively lived and practised. Girls prayed to God with emotional intensity and spoke of God as their truest friend in whom, alone of all beings, they could trust. However, trusting in God sharpened rather than challenged the need to take care of oneself. It was considered that God had given the intellectual ability of judgement to humans, and it was a religious duty to exercise that ability by practising appropriate gendered and classed caution. This construction of personal responsibility for the self, however, was challenged by a girl called Malalai, who moved into a hostel without her parents' knowledge and resisted numerous attempts at patriarchal control through claiming that God would protect her from harm. In this chapter, I explore the tensions that arose when Malalai's imagination of divine care came into conflict with the other hostel residents' conceptualisation of personal responsibility for care of the self. While her professions of faith were not dissimilar to other hostel residents, Malalai was criticized for what was interpreted as a wilful refusal to take care of herself in appropriately gendered ways, invoking a tension between differing conceptualizations of care.

"We need to struggle ourselves": Religiously-motivated self-care

Samayya was a quiet and studious young woman from a village in southern Punjab. Like many of the other girls in the hostel, she was worried that her lack of fluency in English would disadvantage her in her future career and often asked me to help her practise. One evening, her roommate Zakiya came back from work to find Samayya and me seated in their shared room, practising the conjugation of verbs in English together.

"In class I don't know what to say when I have to speak in English," Samayya told her, self-deprecatingly. "I feel so embarrassed."

"Allah gives everyone intellectual ability (*zehen*)," Zakiya said forthrightly. "It is our responsibility (*hamari uper*) to use it. *Zehen* is a gift from Allah and he gives it to everybody - it's a *God-gifted ability* and it's up to us to develop it. If we are too embarrassed to do something like practise English, then we won't progress."

Samayya nodded sheepishly.

During my fieldwork, I found that individual responsibility was something that hostel girls took very seriously, and which came up in many conversations. Maha, a self-possessed student from Faisalabad, was disdainful when I asked her what she thought of a solidarity march organized by students in Lahore: "We need to struggle ourselves. We cannot expect things from other people. The people who are doing things like going on marches, they have a lot of money, a lot of options. They can do a lot of different things. Ordinary people (*aam log*) do not have access to all these things. They have to work hard and accomplish things for themselves." Maha's sense of self-reliance as a way of coping with class inequality and disparity in material resources was paralleled by how Zakiya had gradually adjusted to living in a hostel where her intake of food as a paying guest was resented and stringently policed. At first she had felt humiliated, but over time she had devised ways of assuaging her own hunger without having to give in to the indignity of making requests:

"At first I felt sad, but now I don't. Now, I keep everything in my room that I might need. Sugar, oil, black pepper, red pepper, and that way that I don't have to ask anyone for anything. If I want to eat something, I don't have to ask: 'please give me this, give me that'. In that way, I don't feel bad."

The sense of responsibility for their own welfare that hostel girls express bears a strong resemblance to neoliberal emphasis on individual autonomy and personal responsibility for the self. While neoliberal ideology often manifests in economic policies of privatization and deregulation, numerous scholars show how neoliberalism extends beyond the economic realm as 'a whole way of being and thinking' (Foucault et al. 2008:218), and across the world neoliberal economic policies have been observed to promote ideals of self-management and individual responsibility (Cross 2010; Deuchar & Dyson 2020; Khoja-Moolji 2014; Edmonds 2007; Freeman 2014). The insistence of hostel girls on the need to strive individually for success without relying on collective possibilities for change correlates closely with these attitudes of individual responsibilisation.

I want, however, to avoid a depiction of neoliberalism as an overdetermining and unitary ideology that manifests identically in different contexts. Firstly, Ong draws attention to neoliberalism's flexibility in arguing that it should be understood 'not as a fixed set of attributes with predetermined outcomes, but as a logic of governing that migrates and is selectively taken up in diverse political contexts' (Ong 2007:3). Accompanying neoliberalism's flexibility is its compatibility with other ideologies, aligning in often surprising ways with socialism (Collier 2011), feminism (Fraser 2013), and religion (Gooptu 2016; Iqtidar 2017). Second, as Trnka and Trundle (2014) argue, modes of responsibility also exist outside of and beyond neoliberalism, such that it is possible to trace influences other than neoliberalism in the discourses of personal responsibility expressed by hostel girls. Manata Hashemi argues that, in Iran, 'localized struggles for advancement become privileged over other forms of action in that they provide both meaning and autonomy to the disenfranchised' (Hashemi 2020:7); thus, individualised efforts for self-betterment are viewed as a pragmatic way of achieving a degree of success. Naveeda Khan (2012) further

identifies the attitude of 'striving' in Pakistan as a tendency towards aspiration and working upon the self to achieve a progressively more perfect state. Such an aspiration, Khan argues, relates to the circumstances of Pakistan's formation as a self-proclaimed nation of Muslims and the consequent experimentations with different models of what it might mean to be such a nation. Drawing on the work of the poet Muhammad Iqbal, Khan identifies a tendency towards aspiration and self-creation as deeply rooted in an Islamic ethos of individual responsibility before God for self-development and self-perfection as a Muslim. Within a longer history of colonialism within the South Asian subcontinent, extending prior to the formation of Pakistan, Robinson argues that the experience of colonial rule catalyzed a great degree of questioning among Muslims as to how Islam had lost power, and a degree of contemplation as to the duty of individuals that led to 'the emergence of an activist, willed, for some a protestant - Islam…. At the heart of this activism, and the energy which it created, was the placing of the responsibility of fashioning Islamic society on each individual Muslim - the caliphate of Man' (Robinson 2004:51).

In this light, we can see a concern with personal responsibility for the self not just in terms of a neoliberal ideology of self-motivated, entrepreneurial actors, but in relation to a history of religious reform, colonial domination and current experiences of economic precarity. Given this genealogy, I argue that it is over-limiting to explain hostel girls' attitudes of self-reliance, personal responsibility and the duty to strive solely in terms of an inculcation of neoliberal values. During my fieldwork, I found that understandings of personal responsibility were framed both in terms of a religious duty to fulfil God's will, and a widespread sense of the general untrustworthiness of human beings.

‘You cannot trust everyone’: safety work and self-protection in an untrustworthy world

One evening, as I was eating with Tabassum, Zakiya and Samayya, another hostellite called Reem came to sit down at the table. She had recently graduated with a degree in Chemistry and was job-hunting but, she had complained to me a few days before, was plagued in her search by unwelcome sexual propositions. At her first job interview, a man had offered her the job if she would be his girlfriend – “I slapped him, hard!” she had told me angrily. Now she had a temporary placement in a laboratory, but one of her male colleagues had repeatedly propositioned her and so she was job-hunting again. Knowing this, I asked her chattily, “How is your search going?”

Reem looked unsure. She told us that while she had been walking in the mall that day, a man had approached her. Calling himself a talent scout, he had invited her to his office the following day to try out as a model. Reem was dubious, but also conscious of her dwindling savings and anxious to find work. “Should I go?” she asked.

There was an uncomfortable silence, and the other girls around the table exchanged meaningful glances. Finally, Tabassum gently advised: “Don’t go alone.”

Zakiya agreed. “Take some friend with you.”

Reem nodded but seemed downcast. Possibly she regretted sharing her dilemma. She finished eating and quietly left the table.

During the time that I lived in the hostel in Lahore, I consistently encountered expressions among my fellow residents of a generalized mistrust in others (Carey 2017). Perceptions of me as a ‘foreign student’ – albeit one of Pakistani heritage – might have influenced this, as much of the advice I received had a pedagogic quality. Miss Nazia, who had collected me from the airport when I arrived, explained:

> Some bad people go to the airport just to look - and sometimes they will follow you back, see where you live, steal from you. When we meet you at the airport they can see 'she is not alone, she is with people'. Those people who stand at the airport with a sign saying someone's name - that is to show again that they have connections. They are not alone in Pakistan. You can't trust people here. People will say 'I will show you the way' (*main rasta dekhaunga*) but you cannot trust everyone.

Similar attitudes of mistrust, however, cropped up outside of the hostel space in conversations with people of different social classes and backgrounds, frequently enough that they began to suggest a general social outlook. "What you have to do to survive in Lahore is act as if no one is sane," grumbled Amna, a university professor whom I knew socially, as she changed lanes on the traffic-congested Canal Road. Junaid, a bank clerk and the brother of a friend, complained, "In Pakistan I am a rich man. There are many poor people. So they steal, they humiliate. People want to humiliate you…want to make you feel small", while Hammad, a rickshaw driver who took me to the market one day, told me forcefully as he sped through an alley: "Every person is second rate (h*ar banda do number*)! Everyone is out for what they can get." The sense of a general lack of trust in others contrasts with the 'civil indifference…[serving] to sustain attitudes of generalized trust' (Giddens 1991:46), which Giddens considers fundamental to a sense of ontological security. While Giddens argues that predictability and routine are key to ontological security (Giddens 1991:40), people that I met asserted that, in Pakistan, the only dependable factor was the inherent unpredictability of others, and the possibility that their co-presence entailed for harm.

Hostel girls were particularly emphatic proponents of the discourse of generalized mistrust, reflecting their classed and gendered identities as well as their experiences of rural-urban migration. In contrast to villages, which were imagined as timeless and safe, inhabited by people who were *simple* and straightforward (*seedha-saaf*), Pakistani cities were

conceptualized as threatening and hostile, corresponding with global perceptions of cities as places of insecurity and danger (Caldeira 2000; Dinzey-Flores 2013; Kaker 2013; Low 2003; Penglase 2014), and within these environments hostel girls felt themselves to be highly vulnerable to predation. Without coresident male relatives to provide practical support, combined with perceptions of them as morally out of place through their transgressions of gendered spatial and behavioural norms, hostel girls understood themselves as at high risk of sexual harassment and stranger-inflicted gendered violence. Most of these fears coalesced around the abject figure of working-class migrant men, who were constructed as the supreme threat to middle-class hostel girls, even though many girls, like Reem, had experienced harassment from colleagues, peers and authority figures at work or college. Thus, Miss Nazia told me warningly that, "Hostels have this reputation for girls who are loose, easy. If you take a taxi in odd hours, the driver may think you are one of those girls."

To prevent themselves being perceived as vulnerable, many hostel girls would tell colleagues or friends that they lived with family in the city. However, such strategies were only considered a temporary evasion of a ubiquitious social threat, as Miss Nazia acknowledged resignedly:

> Men in Pakistan are very dangerous. If a woman goes to the police here, he will look at her in a nasty way. He will first want to have sex with her and then will help her. This is how things are here. This is the bitter reality. But we are surviving. But you need to know these things.
>
> Every girl here has to face these things. Even myself, when I was a Bachelors, I had a professor - I still remember his name - who harassed me…. And every girl has to deal with these things. Even the other day I heard Mahum talking to Gauriya, she was saying 'in the first session the professor gave us his name and told us to call him'. Why is he giving his number in the first session? Don't go to any night stays. You don't know who these people are. Even here we don't go for night stays with family. She might be nice, but you don't know about her son, about her husband.

As institutions set up specifically to accommodate single women in the city, hostel theoretically mitigate the risk that unaccompanied women are exposed to. However, as Chapters 2 and 3 argue, girls often experienced hostels less as secure enclaves of protection than as spaces rife with different kinds of danger. Girls felt financially exploited by punitively high rents and arbitrarily-added additional charges for cleaning, internet access, and even cups of tea after meals, and powerless to do much about these exigencies in an environment where they held little power. One of the most prevalent sources of danger, however, was imagined to be other hostel girls. The diversity of regional origins among girls coming to the city meant that hostels were full of unknown others, often speaking diverse dialects and following different practices, whose habits and behaviours were unknown and potentially dangerous. The stigmatized reputations of women living away from home meant that hostel girls often regarded each other not as allies united by solidarity under conditions of struggle, but as potential threats to wellbeing and security. Girls feared moral pollution through proximity to unknown and dubious others, whose behaviour might adversely affect their own reputations. Reem, for example, complained:

> I don't like the other girls in the hostel. I feel that our personalities don't match. I want to dress in a way that makes people respect me, and they dress in a way that people won't respect - they wear short dresses…. I think they take advantage of their parents' being far away. They come to the hostel, they go out and come in, they dress how they want.

By practising the same gendered suspicion on each other that they themselves were subjected to, hostel girls lived out a more universalized form of ontological insecurity than one simply predicated upon the co-presence of strange and potentially dangerous men. While sexual danger and misogynistic violence was considered ubiquitous, hostel girls did not take refuge in a cosy imagination of solidarity between women or a benignly charitable

provision of hostel accommodation. Rather, their sense of risk was generalized, potentially emanating from all social relationships.

Although the sense of ever-present menace that haunted hostel girls might seem conducive to anomie, Matthew Carey argues against the assumption that mistrust should be understood as 'social acid', corroding human bonds (Carey 2017: 17). Rather than simply a deficit of trust, he argues, mistrust is 'an alternative hypothesis and one that gives rise to social forms of its own' (Carey 2017: 18), engendering particular kinds of social relations. Vera-Gray and Kelly's description of safety work (2020), the invisible labour performed by women in public to mitigate gendered danger, suggests how an attitude of mistrust generates embodied ways of being and particular kinds of social relations. In Mumbai, Phadke, Ranade and Khan describe how women move purposefully through public space, displaying sartorial signs of marital status to signal the legitimacy of their presence while stigmatized others are scapegoated as urban threats (Phadke et al. 2011). In the United Kingdom, Vera-Gray and Kelly show how women and girls draw on strategies including 'changing routes home to choosing seats on public transport, physically reducing themselves in public, to using headphones and sunglasses as a way of feeling invisible' (Vera-Gray & Kelly 2020:266). Noting that such strategies may not increase women's immediate safety, Lennox (2021) argues that they nonetheless have a protective function in terms of virtue management. By establishing themselves as 'risk-averse subjects' (Lennox 2021: 643), women signal compliance with gendered norms and offset the stigma of being perceived as out of place. Such individualized bodily and social labours engender a sense of ontological security in the context of a generalized sense of precarity.

Hostel girls engaged in many similar kinds of safety work to those described above. In the streets girls moved swiftly and decisively, demonstrating their tasked and purposeful

labours, and in buses, rickshaws and taxis they sat with compressed and folded bodies, occupying little space and with set, unsmiling faces that stared into the middle distance without making eye contact with strangers. However, alongside the safety work that women carry out in public space, I also saw forms of safety work carried out by hostel girls within dining rooms, corridors and bedrooms. As described in Chapter 3, girls maintained physical distance from their co-residents within the hostel and buried themselves in their phones to minimise conversation; many girls carried important possessions with them at all times to minimise the chance of theft, and were highly conscious of what personal information they shared with others. There was little communal spirit in the hostel; although some roommates had close friendships, like I did with Tabassum, Zakiya and Samayya, these were the exception rather than the rule. Challenging a sharp distinction between inside/outside or public/private as safe/unsafe, the sense of jeopardy surrounding hostel girls was more generalized, emanating from the spaces in which and the bodies alongside whom they lived. Girls were cautious in the friendships they cultivated and reticent in the information that they shared even with their most intimate acquaintances. Ironically, these kinds of protective practices sometimes rendered girls more vulnerable. Zakiya, for example, felt unable to tell her parents about the humiliation she had experienced when her paycheque went missing and she was not able to pay her rent on time. Miss Nazia rapidly became abusive, shouting at her for wasting electricity and telling her that she was 'ruining the atmosphere of the hostel'. Deeply insulted, Zakiya raged impotently that if she had the money to pay the warden, she would leave this hostel immediately.

"Can you ask your parents to send you some money until your pay arrives?" I asked her.

"No. If I told my parents what has happened, they would send me the money, but they would make me come back. They only let me be here because I am supporting myself. If I

tell them about this matter my father will say, 'Why are you in Lahore?' He will compel me to come back. And I can't get a job there. So I can't tell them."

Zakiya knew that if her parents learned of any of the difficulties she was experiencing she would be considered responsible, even if she were the victim; the trust that her parents placed in her to live away from home could only be proved right by keeping many aspects of her life a secret. During this time, Zakiya prayed frequently to God, unburdening herself of the frustration and humiliation brought about by the warden's contemptuous treatment of her, and experiencing the relief of being able to offer up the entirety of herself to be lovingly and unconditionally accepted.

'The only one you can trust is Allah': cultivating a relationship with the Divine

The generalized mistrust that formed a backdrop to hostel girls' lives contrasted strikingly with their expressions of total trust in God. Indeed, hostel girls explicitly contrasted the untrustworthiness of human beings with divine infallibility and perfection. The evaluation of the relative levels of trust in human and divine parties to a relationship suggested that hostel girls saw the relationships as somewhat comparable, different in quality rather than in kind. Both kinds of relationship involved trust, but that which could be placed in God was infinitely greater than that which could be entrusted to human care.

As I consider how hostellites imagined God as a party to a relationship, I am conscious of Schielke's observation that anthropologists tend to focus more on 'Muslims' and 'Islam' than on the way that people experience God (Schielke 2019:1). Noting that 'A quick glance at recent articles, books, conferences and funded projects shows a clear preference of 'Islam' and 'Muslim' and the relative rarity of 'God' or 'Allah' (the Arabic name of the One God)

as keywords' (2019: 1), Schielke argues that 'Islam without the subject of human submission and worship, the One God, makes as little sense as Christianity with Christ the Son of God'. However, while Schielke advocates approaching 'relations between humans and God… as a multitude of relationships of power' (Schielke 2019: 2), his ethnography principally demonstrates the way in which God comes into view as a third party in human relationships, as a guarantor, witness or judge of human action. In so doing, God still appears strangely absent from his text, a being referenced by humans rather than the second party of a dyadic relationship. In contrast, Tanya Luhrmann (2012) and Niloofer Haeri (2021) both demonstrate explain how individuals experience a relationship with the Divine as an agential presence, corresponding much more closely with the way that I found people in Pakistan described God as a being with whom an intimate dyadic relationship is possible.

During my fieldwork people I met often talked about what it meant to them to be in relationship with God. For many, although it was possible to compare relationships with other humans and with God in terms of relative trust, the experience of a relationship with God was distinct by virtue of His nature as a divine being. In the Islamic *dars* classes given to hostellites, Sakeena Auntie would often tell us impressively, "Allah is kinder even than your father and mother." The way that she made this proclamation seemed intended as paradoxical, as if she was offering us a mind-expanding riddle: was it possible to imagine any being kinder even than your father and mother? Sakeena Auntie's phrasing challenged hostel girls' imaginations, encouraging us to contemplate the impossibility of fully comprehending God – human abilities of description or understanding could attempt to approach, but could never fully encapsulate His nature.

Many discussions about God lingered on His fundamental incommensurability with human powers of comprehension (Schielke 2019: 12). In conversations, people often drew

on passages from the Qur'an that followed a partnered, complementary pattern, such as descriptions of God as one who 'neither begets nor is begotten' (Qur'an 112:3), who knows 'what lies before and what lies after [His creation]' (Qur'an 2:255) and who knows 'what is invisible and what is invisible' (Qur'an 59:20). Such passages, recited in Arabic or in Urdu translation, were appreciated not only for their poetic beauty but for the totality of the nature that they described, all-encompassing and surpassing human understanding.

The sublime nature of God was further evidenced by the ninety-nine 'beautiful names of God' (*asma'u llahi l'husna*), which Sakeena Auntie encouraged hostellites to memorise in *dars* class. Many of God's names take the form of adjectival nouns: *al-Latif,* the Kind; *al-Ghafur*, the Ever-forgiving; *al-Ali*, the Sublime; *ash-Shakur*, the Grateful. The nominalized adjectival form of these names present God as the epitome of these qualities, beyond all comparison. Several names have a mirrored quality, indicating contrasting attributes. For example, names for God include *al-Mumiyt*, the Bringer of Death, and *al-Muhy*i, the Giver of Life; *al-Awwal*, the First and *al-Akhir*, the Final; *az-Zahir*, the Manifest and *al-Batin*, the Hidden; *al-Muzil*, the Giver of Disgrace and *al-Muizz*, the Giver of Honour. Like the *ayaat* that people recited, these complementary names emphasise the totality of God's nature, incorporating all possibilities.

During my fieldwork I noticed that people tended to speak about and to God using different terms. In the third person, God was usually spoken of as Allah *subhana wa ta'ala* (may He be praised and exalted), but when people spoke directly to God in the second person they would use a range of names. Allah *ta'ala* (Allah the most high), Allah *mian* (Lord Allah) and simply Allah were all commonly used; Samayya liked to say Allah because: "It sounds so good in my mouth – Al-laaahh!", she explained, as she sounded it out luxuriously. People used the vocative eh to address God directly and personally: *eh meray*

Allah (Oh my God), *eh meray rab* (Oh my lord) or *eh meray khuda* (oh my lord). The plural form of *meray* denoted respect, and one woman that I met, a middle-aged Urdu teacher, criticized its usage for implying that God was more than one being, contrary to the principle of the oneness of God or *tawhid*. However, hostel girls to whom I relayed this seemed taken aback. "That is true, of course," said Malalai carefully; "we know that God is One. But I also think that we must speak of Allah with respect." The care given to considering how to address God, recognizing His singular nature while also expressing respect, underlined the sense of His personality as a distinct being.

Speaking directly to God was thought to make one's heart 'cool' (*thand*) and bring peace (*sukoon*). The somatic effects experienced during and after prayer confirmed God's listening presence. One evening Malalai was seated on her prayer mat, having completed the evening prayer. She sat with her eyes closed, smiling softly, rocking very slightly back and forth. Eventually she unfurled her body and stood up slowly and dreamily, telling me, "I felt like I was being hugged, like Allah *ta'ala* was holding me. Allah *ta'ala aap itni mohabbat karte hain* (Allah, you give so much love/you are so loving)." Malalai spoke to me in English, as she often preferred to do, but shifted into Urdu to speak to God in a way that suggested a greater intimacy. Sara, another hostellite, felt a change in her body when she attended *dars* class: "When we sit in these spaces together, our soul gets that refreshment. So yesterday when there was a class I came back and I was like: '*Alhamdulillah, Alhamdulillah* (praise be to Allah), I got that freshness. I'm feeling so free now.'"

Some of God's qualities, such as kindness, listening, love and forgiveness, might also be experienced in a human relationship, with a trusted friend or an intimate relative. Hostel girls often spoke lovingly of the care that they received from their mothers, who sent them nourishing food, massaged their heads with oil and prayed for their wellbeing: "Mothers'

hearts are very soft," Zakiya said, a little wistfully. Mothers, however, generally rurally-based, with other children to care for and dependent on their husbands for support, were also vulnerable human beings with finite capacities, often with fewer resources and greater burdens than their daughters. Hostel girls, living in the city, earning their own wages and mostly unmarried, felt a sense of responsibility towards their mothers, and tried to protect them from distress by withholding difficult experiences from their knowledge. Zakiya struggled in silence with lack of funds and the humiliation she experienced at the hands of Miss Nazia not only because she anticipated being forced to return home by her father, but because she did not want her mother to worry. Similarly, when Gauria experienced such terrible food poisoning that she was hospitalized for dehydration she refused to let me call her family to let them know she was in hospital: "My mother is far sicker than me," she told me tearfully. The geographic distance between mothers in the rural hinterlands and daughters in the cities of Pakistan did not impede reciprocal flows of cross-generational care, but it influenced how these practices of care took shape. Mothers sent carefully wrapped packages of home-cooked food and sweetened buffalo milk to their daughters to nourish their bodies in the hostile and threatening city, while hostel girls sought to protect their mothers from anxiety by presenting themselves as resolutely cheerful and untroubled, keeping secret any problems that their mothers might worry over helplessly.

Being in relationship with God, on the other hand, was described as a welcome experience of total vulnerability. God's total omniscience and omnipotence – His ability to see 'what is invisible and what is invisible' (Qur'an 59:20) meant that evasions or circumlocutions were not only impossible, but pointless. In conversations with God, therefore, hostel girls could abdicate the psychic defences and guardedness that characterized other relationships and feel a kind of relief in offering up their most difficult,

negative and unacceptable feelings. I was often struck by how conversations with God were described in ways reminiscent of client-centred therapy (Rogers 2003), as people talked about feeling absolutely and unconditionally accepted by God and having their most difficult emotions safely contained by the experience of prayer. In contrast to humans, God was presented as untiring in His capacity to listen and inexhaustible in His capacity for mercy.

"Allah *ta'ala* is my security:" Malalai's problematic relationship with God

Malalai, one of my fellow hostel residents, was one person who spoke particularly passionately about her relationship with God. In her mid-thirties, more than ten years older than most of the other girls in the hostel, Malalai was living in a hostel for the first time. She knew Samayya from her university classes and had been introduced to Miss Nazia through her; when she moved in, she was assigned to a bed in Tabassum's three-person room and was ostensibly preparing for her final examinations in accounting. However, Malalai had not started attending university classes with Samayya when the semester started. She was considering taking a job, and spent much of her time in the hostel searching for likely posts and completing job applications while the other hostellites were out at work or their classes. This meant that she and I were often the only ones in the hostel during the day, and as we spent more and more time together, Malalai began to tell me about her relationship with God.

Malalai spoke to God as one of whom she had lived and intimate knowledge. "Allah is so close to you," she told me, as she sat gracefully on her bed. "He sees what is inside and what is outside. You know what our Qur'an says? Allah is closer to us than our jugular vein." She lifted her hand to her neck and gently patted her throat. "Allah is this close." Her

voice lingered lovingly on the emphasis, as if she cherished the idea. Her sense of God's proximity affected her bodily presentation, as she tried to be always in a ritually pure state: "Whenever I use the washroom, I always do *wuzu* (ablution) straight away afterwards. It is a very easy thing to do, and this way I always feel like I am clean and *ready* in front of Allah *ta'ala*."

Although Malalai sensed that God was close by, her behaviour also suggested that she conceptually located Him as being above her in space. When she spoke directly to God, as she did frequently, she often looked up. One evening when she, Samayya and I were seated on the roof together, a cool breeze momentarily stirred the damp hair on our necks. The sky was turning a rosy pink in the west, and Malalai smiled up at the sky, almost arch in her manner. "You knew just what we needed, didn't you?" she murmured, and kissed her hand towards the clouds. "Thank you Allah *ta'ala*, you are so giving to us." On another day, as she and I walked on the roof in the evening, she again located God above in describing how the pre-dawn prayer, *fajr*, brings you especially close to God:

"At *fajr*, when the world is quiet, it is very difficult to get up for *namaz* (prayer). At that time, God comes down to the lowest of the seven skies and he listens to your prayers. He is very close then, and He is happy that you are asking Him for something."

Sometimes I found Malalai irritating. She presented herself as someone with a great deal of cosmopolitan religious knowledge, who had visited Saudi Arabia and even been to Mecca. She frequently delivered impromptu sermons, or *khutbahs*, to the other hostel girls whether they asked for them or not, and I felt that she spoke to me particularly condescendingly, viewing me as an ignorant foreigner in need of religious instruction. While sometimes her patronizing tones made me bristle, however, I also felt that Malalai was

lonely. The only person that she knew in the hostel was Samayya, who was out at university classes most days and whose close friendship with Zakiya left little time for others. Malalai had no other friends among her classmates, complaining that they were unfriendly and gossipy, and she seemed to have no fixed plans for her future. She was undecided about whether she would return to university to complete her studies or not. However, she was also worried about her employability if she did not complete her final exams.

As I got to know her better, hints that Malalai dropped made me wonder if the intimate relationship with God that she described was connected to difficulties in her personal life. One evening she told me, with great fervour:

"I love Allah *ta'ala* a lot. Do you know what you should do with Allah *ta'ala* - you should talk to Him. Whenever I feel to say something to Allah *ta'ala*, I do not feel that Allah *ta'ala* is too far from me. I always feel that Allah *ta'ala* is too close to me, and I am free to say anything at any time. Let's suppose that I am feeling a lot of love for Allah *ta'ala*, so I will stay here and say 'Allah *ta'ala*, I love you so much, you are so good.'"

"Do you feel like Allah *ta'ala* is listening?" I asked her.

"Yes! Seriously, why should we feel like Allah *ta'ala* is far from us? Allah *ta'ala* is always with us and He is always listening you. Even if you are having something in your heart, even, deep in your heart, you are not speaking - but still Allah *ta'ala* listens. So never feel that Allah *ta'ala* is far - you are free to tell Allah *ta'ala* anything. And yes, He listens. He listens."

She paused, and then spoke hesitantly.

"When there were obstacles in my life, you know, and I felt very - alone - and I felt like life was finished, you know, bla bla bla. You know what I used to do in those days? In my

room there was a TV, and one of the channels there was a live transmission of Makkah (Mecca, the religious city in Saudi Arabia). I would leave that channel on, live Makkah would keep playing, I would keep looking at the Ka'aba. I would feel peaceful, I would not be worried, as long as I was looking, as long as the sound of the Qur'an was in my ears."

Malalai never went into details about what those obstacles in her life at that time were, but my impression was that they might have related to her family relationships. Malalai rarely spoke of her family, except to say briefly that her parents lived in Saudi Arabia, where her father was working. She had told Tabassum that she had no family in Lahore during the Eid celebrations, and had called Tabassum in tears from Lahore, begging to be allowed to come to the latter's home because she was frightened to remain alone in their shared room. Over the phone, Tabassum had tried to reassure her that she would come to no harm:

"Put your trust in Allah and lock the door. Do not worry, nothing will happen. There are security cameras everywhere in the hostel. Have you gone to the warden? Go to her now and tell her, 'I am your responsibility' – she needs to make sure that you are safe. Trust in God and in the security cameras."

Malalai had been so upset, however, that Tabassum's father had arranged a bus ticket for her to their village, at some inconvenience. When Malalai later mentioned that her married sister lived in Lahore, Tabassum was confused. "Why didn't she go to her sister for Eid? Why would she choose to come to my home when she could have been with her own family?"

Malalai's family circumstances appeared even more mysterious when it transpired that she was living in the hostel without her parents' knowledge or approval. One evening she stormed into her room, where I was chatting with Tabassum, and sunk tearfully onto the

ground. Between sobs, she explained that Miss Nazia had instructed her to provide her father's identity card and telephone number, so that she could speak to him about Malalai's stay. Malalai's father, however, did not know that she was living in the hostel, and she dreaded his finding out.

"I know that my father will never agree to me being in a hostel," Malalai sobbed, wringing her hands. "He thinks hostel girls are bad. What can I do? I cannot give his number; I cannot stay here."

Tabassum and I were both shocked by her state. While we tried to comfort her, Malalai sobbed out seemingly random options. "I should leave my studies. I am only here for my studies; I should get some job, then I can move. I cannot stay in Lahore, where everyone knows me. Should I move to a different city? Should I get married? I will get married. I don't care anymore. I will get a job, where I can help people who are really *deserving*. I will do something with my life! I wish I could get a job out of this country, outside, where people live independently."

The atmosphere in the room was fraught. Malalai was weeping and gasping out furious plans and ideas; I was bewildered and alarmed, while Tabassum listened with great concern and tried to reason with Malalai. "Be reasonable, Malalai. Just think. You can't just shift to another city. The environment will not be good. You will not be safe."

"I should go to Malaysia," Malalai declared. "The way my family think, *outside* is better than *inside*. My father will never support me living in a hostel. He doesn't care. He will never support my living here; I will never be able to get his permission. Should I shift? I should shift to some other hostel?"

Tabassum tried to dissuade her. “You can’t just move to any hostel, Malalai. I know about other hostels. The one just opposite, they found a boy in there once, he had sneaked in. This hostel is safe, at least; there are security cameras everywhere here. Your *security* is important -”

“Allah *ta’ala* is my *security*!” declared Malalai, sitting upright and tossing her head dismissively.

Tabassum looked flummoxed. “Yes, but Malalai, you also need to take care of yourself.”

In the days that followed, Malalai continued to evade Miss Nazia’s requests, and then demands, for her father’s telephone number, while simultaneously fomenting a variety of plans: moving hostel, moving city, even applying for a visa and getting a job abroad. Her sense of entrapment was distressing to witness, and her frantic attempts to avoid either the warden or her father’s knowledge of her situation demonstrated how desperate she felt.

A few days later, Malalai told us that Miss Nazia had said she could stay another month. “I suppose she wants another month of rent from me! But I don’t want to stay that long. I just want to leave this place.”

Malalai was sitting on the floor, ankles crossed daintily under her, while Tabassum was lying on her own bed with headphones plugged into her ears. I had been lying on the other bed typing, but I stopped to listen.

“I think I should move to another city,” Malalai pondered. “I should do some service *(khidmat*). I want to help people who are really *deserving*. Yasmeen, don’t you have any friends in any other cities? Can you connect me?”

Before I could respond, Tabassum interjected. She was clearly dismayed. “Malalai, just think a little. This is a bad idea. How will you manage in a different city? Everyone will always want to know where you are from, who your parents are. How can you live without family support? This is not possible. Not in Pakistan. This is our society.”

“I cannot rely on my family,” Malalai replied firmly. Her voice was becoming choked again. “I have no one. I have no one, I only have Allah.”

“Be realistic,” Tabassum said, but Malalai, tears beginning to fill her eyes, interrupted her again: “I will show my family!”

“Malalai, *shut up*,” Tabassum said brusquely. “*Shut up, listen to me*-”

But Malalai carried on, openly weeping. “All my family want is for me to marry! They don’t want me to study. I had to pay all my own semester fees by selling my jewellery. My father wouldn’t even pay one and a half lakh for me.”

Malalai seemed consumed in sorrow. She was rocking back and forth, sobbing, arms clasped around her knees.

Tabassum got off her bed and came to the floor, opposite Malalai.

“So get yourself married,” Tabassum counselled her. “Hope that your husband will cooperate. Encourage your family to convince your in-laws to let you study.”

“They never, never will,” Malalai said mournfully. “My family are talking of a second marriage for me. They want me to be a second wife.”

“Put your trust in God,” Tabassum advised.

“I don’t have anyone,” Malalai wept. “Allah is my only friend, my only parent.”

"Malalai, be realistic," Tabassum repeated. "Living without parents is very difficult-"

Malalai was inconsolable. When the evening meal was prepared, she refused to go downstairs to eat. She spread her prayer mat on the floor and prayed, tears streaming down her face, lifting her hands imploringly to the sky.

* * *

It was around this time that the other hostel girls began to express a great deal of impatience with Malalai. Tabassum was annoyed by her 'unrealistic' ideas: "She tells me she wants to leave the city and go somewhere else, maybe so that her family cannot find her. Where will she go? It is very difficult to live without family. Maybe bad things will happen to her. Who knows what will happen? She cannot live alone."

Zakiya also expressed doubt about Malalai's ability to manage. "She is too dependent. Every day she needs Samayya's help even to put on her *abaya* and *niqab*. She can't manage things alone." Zakiya and Samayya had shared a room for four years and were very good friends, but Zakiya felt that Malalai's dependency on Samayya was excessive. "I feel guilty when I need something; I never ask anyone for anything. The only person I ask for things from is Samayya, and even then I feel guilty."

"Even in the hospital I never ask anyone for help with my work," agreed Tabassum severely. "I never give work to anyone. I would be ashamed to make work for someone else."

Tabassum was particularly annoyed by Malalai's messiness. "I cannot relax when my room is messy. I used to live with five other girls in my old hostel –"

"I was in a five-seater in my last hostel," piped up Ambaa, Tabassum's other roommate, from her bed in the corner.

"– I was in a six-seater, but we kept everything tidy. When I first came here, I didn't know how to do it, but I saw how other girls arranged things and I thought, I like this, so I started to keep my things tidily too. But Malalai doesn't know how to do it. And she tells me all her problems and it makes me feel so worried.

"One night she was praying in the dark, and she was crying. I woke up from the noise and it was all dark, and she was crying and crying, and I was so scared! I said to her 'stop crying, stop crying.' But it's too much. She is a nice soul, but she is too *dependent*."

Even Samayya, the most patient of her friends, agreed reluctantly, "She is not *adjusted* to living in a hostel environment. You need to be able to look after yourself (a*pne-aap ko sambhalna*). In our families, we learn to stay within our limits, if not our parents will tell us. But Malalai hasn't had that training."

I do not rule out the possibility that some of the censure of Malalai's behaviour reflected other girls' disapproval of her unorthodox habitation of the hostel. The fact that she was living in the hostel without her parents' knowledge was almost unimaginable to the others, whose mobility outside the family home had only been accomplished through much negotiation and considerable familial oversight, and their advice reflected their adherence to established systems of gendered familial relations. Tabassum's advice to 'trust in God' by reconsidering the marriage Malalai's family had planned hinged on the hope that the marriage would turn out well, whereas the trust in God that Malalai expressed imagined a safe future down an unknown path, in a city or even a country far away. Such a future was radical in its imagination, even disturbing in its transgression of normalized gender

expectations, and it is possible that some of the criticism of Malalai was prompted by the rebelliousness of her desires and plans.

What struck me, however, was that the criticism of Malalai repeatedly converged around a mismatch in expectations of self-care. Girls did not discuss the radicality of her intentions as much as their impracticality, and what they suggested about her failure to care for herself appropriately. Malalai was seen as too dependent on others' care, and as insufficiently alert to her own vulnerability. Her projected plans to move hostel, city or even country were seen as not only impractical, but ignorant of the threat she would face as a single woman without support.

Malalai's insistence that God would be her 'security', ensuring her safety in whatever path she took, was considered a deeply misguided attitude, since trusting in God did not preclude the need to be self-reliant. Rather, a sensible person would enact their faith in God by behaving as wisely and taking as much care as possible. While they acknowledged God's infinite mercy, kindness and power, girls reminded themselves and each other that they had been given specific abilities by God and it was their responsibility (as Zakiya put it, *hamari uper*, on us) to strive. When Samayya was struggling with her coursework, she would often recite Ayat 13:11 from the Qur'an - 'Indeed Allah will not change the conditions of a population until they change what is in themselves' – to encourage herself to keep working. Reem also told me impressively:

"My father told me a story when I was young. Our dear Prophet [Muhammad] saw a man leaving his camel untethered, and he said, "Trust in God but tie up your camel." That means we must trust in God, but we also have to take care of ourselves. God gave us ability and that is our duty."

Through this lens, Malalai's profession of trust in God became suspect as a refusal of what the other girls saw as her duty towards her own self-care.

It struck me as significant that the hostellites who disapproved of her plans chose to adjust their own behaviour rather than continue to argue with her. Zakiya, who had lived in several hostels over some years in Lahore, spent time reasoning with her about the difficulty involved in moving to a new city. When she grew exasperated with Malalai's insistence, she began to respond flatly to Malalai's equivocations with statements like, "It's your choice" and "May God protect you," rather than debating with her. Tabassum, too, decided that "I have given [Malalai] my advice, I can't force her. I have told her what I think, and I will not talk any more about this." Instead, Tabassum began to withdraw from conversation, seeking refuge in her mobile phone when alone with Malalai. "Malalai says, 'Tabassum, I feel like you are my husband, you come back and just go on your phone!' But my job is stressful, I need to be fresh at work. If I listen to Malalai then I am worried, I can't rest. That's why instead I come back and bury myself in my phone." Both Zakiya and Tabassum found ways of adjusting their own conduct, taking responsibility within their circumscribed capacities for their own wellbeing.

Conclusion

Expressions of total trust in God take on a certain poignancy in the context of the ever-present sense of danger that characterize girls' experience of hostel life. As Smith notes in Cairo, faith in God acts both as a tool and a coping mechanism against injustice (Smith 2016) similarly, the remarkable nature of God's trustworthiness seemed to gain force in Pakistan from its total contrast with the untrustworthiness of everyone else. Even beloved family members and friends could not be trusted with the entire truth about hostel girls'

lives, whereas God could be. The complete disjuncture between the relationship possible with God compared to that available with other humans did not call into question those safety-seeking behaviours – rather, it delineated their necessity by contrasting the different qualities of the relationships. A relationship with God became an opportunity for an entirely different kind of experience, a moment of anti-structure or being 'in and out of time' (Turner 1997:96) that provided temporary respite from constant vigilance and watchfulness but did not remove its necessity. Indeed, sometimes the frequent injunctions to 'trust in God' seemed to bolster the attitude of generalized mistrust, by making trustworthiness solely a Divine characteristic.

Viewing trust in this way helps to explain why Tabassum was so shocked by Malalai's declared intention to move hostel, or even city. In doing so, Malalai wholly refused the expected attitude of caution, insisting that God would keep her safe. Tabassum, however, saw this as a deeply misguided attitude, since trusting in God did not preclude the need to be self-reliant – rather, one must enact their faith in God by behaving as wisely and taking as much care as possible. We never debated whether Malalai's fear of her father was justified or not. No one ever speculated what would happen if he were to find out, just as we never discussed why Malalai might have felt unable to live with her married sister on the other side of Lahore, or the brother-in-law she never spoke of. But Tabassum felt that Malalai's actions were deeply unrealistic, wilfully ignoring the reality and ubiquity of gendered violence that she was at risk from. For Tabassum, the very fact that relationships could be precarious and unsafe meant that you needed to be more cautious, not less responsible.

For all Malalai's proclaimed intentions, however, I do not think there was as much of a disjuncture between her sense of risk and Tabassum's as might appear. While she was musing on the possibility of moving to a new city, moving hostel, even going abroad, she

soothed and cajoled Miss Nazia, equivocating and half-promising to provide her father's details. At the same time, she sounded out Samayya and Zakiya about moving into their room, and also surreptitiously enquired about rooms in other hostels in the area. She went to view a couple of empty rooms, taking me with her for support, and enquired carelessly about the documentation demanded by each one for entry. When she found a hostel with a vacant room that required no confirmation of parental authority, she moved in a matter of hours, stymying our warden who had not, I think, expected such a swift conclusion. In resolving her difficulties, Malalai covertly assessed multiple options before acting, displaying caution, judgment and a mistrust of even other hostellites like Tabassum and me who might betray her inadvertently. Her declared faith in God did not, after all, preclude her ability to be self-reliant.

Chapter 5: ‘Girls should be ready for anything’: beauty, grooming and time in the lives of hostel girls

I thought that Tabassum would already be sleeping when I returned to Fahmida Hostel that winter night. My roommate’s schedule as a trainee doctor was onerous, and she would usually fall asleep as soon as she returned from the hospital. When I opened our bedroom door, however, the overhead light was on and Tabassum was sitting up in bed. She had propped a compact mirror open on one knee, balanced her mobile phone on the other, and was glancing alternately between the mirror and a video playing on the phone. Copying the actions of a woman on the screen, she was carefully stroking powder along her cheekbones with a cosmetics brush.

“Are you going out somewhere?” I asked after we had greeted each other.

Tabassum laughed embarrassedly. “No, I am *practising*,” she explained.

“Practising?” I said, surprised.

“Yes… I thought I should become skilled at applying make-up.”

Over that winter, Tabassum carried out her ‘practice’ several times, propping herself up against the headboard of her bed and carefully follow the instructions of a YouTube makeup tutorial. The look that she was most eager to practise, she told me, was contouring. This required blending light- and dark-coloured makeup on the face in order to create the illusion of planes of light and shadow, giving the appearance of a more chiselled jawline and higher cheekbones. After spending forty-five minutes to an hour carefully applying a succession of powders and creams, she would take some photos on her phone and then wash her face.

Tabassum never wore the makeup out of the hostel or shared the pictures with anyone – they simply stayed on her phone, evidence of her labour.

What was Tabassum practising for? I asked her one day.

"In case I have to go to a wedding, or to some function," she replied. "I think I should know how to apply make-up, so that I can be *ready*."

Other girls in the hostel were also 'practising'. Samayya unpinned the veil over the lower portion of her face one day to show me the bright magenta lipstick she was wearing. Although Samayya always wore niqab when leaving the enclosed space of the hostel, it didn't matter to her that her lipstick would be invisible under the veil. She was not wearing it to make an impression on others, but to increase her habituation to wearing make-up itself.

"I have decided to copy Tabassum," Samayya explained. "I want to *practise* applying make-up now, so that I will know what to do in the future. We should be prepared (*ham ne tayyar honi chaiyye*)."

"Prepared for what?" I asked.

"For anything. Girls should be *ready* for whatever comes. We should *practise* now."

Like Tabassum, Samayya recorded her efforts to 'practise' photographically. As we sat together in her room one day, Samayya showed me some pictures on her phone. The photos were selfies, in which Samayya was wearing the bright magenta lipstick, and she had taken them while standing next to the window in her room, so that the daylight illuminated her skin. She had unbraided her long, thick hair so that it fell luxuriantly over her shoulders and partially over her face. In some pictures she was looking directly into the camera and

smiling, while in others she was in profile, gazing dreamily out of the window as if unaware of the camera.

"I often do this when I am alone or bored," Samayya told me, scrolling through the photos. "I *practise* putting on make-up and then I take pictures."

"Do you send them to anyone?" I asked. I knew that Samayya was married, and that her husband lived in Dubai. Knowing that she rarely saw him, I wondered if the pictures were taken with him as an imagined audience.

"No, no one. Sometimes to my mother. But no one else."

Samayya's roommate Zakiya, an astute young woman with a biting, cynical wit, had fewer opportunities to 'practise' applying make-up. She usually wore a dark red lipstick and a pale foundation, several shades lighter than her natural skin tone, to her office in a textile factory, but her hours were long and left little time for experimentation - six days a week she left the hostel at half-past seven in the morning, returning, exhausted, after eight o'clock at night. One weekend, however, she allowed another hostel resident to apply a 'look' on her. Ambaa was just seventeen, recently arrived in the hostel from her village in southern Punjab, and she brought Zakiya triumphantly into Tabassum's and my room to show her new 'look'. Zakiya's face was powdered so pale as to be almost white, with a pink blusher on her pointed cheekbones. Her dark eyes were outlined with a gold liner on top of pink and green-shaded eyeshadow and her lips were painted a glossy scarlet. Ambaa smiled modestly as Tabassum and Samayya, who was sitting with us, critiqued the look with great interest. "The blusher is nice," said Tabassum thoughtfully, "but I don't like so much eyeshadow. It should be more subtle." Samayya, on the other hand, was generously praising of Ambaa's work: "*MashaAllah.* You've done well. I should learn to do just this same work."

Meanwhile, Zakiya was using the camera of her mobile phone to examine her own face from every angle. She turned her head from side to side consideringly, tracing the shading of colours on the angles of her face, and took pictures of herself, pursing her lips into a tight smile in order to hide her slightly protruding teeth.

Malalai, who lived in the hostel for only a couple of months, was the only one of my close friends who never, to my knowledge, 'practised' make-up. In her late thirties, she had perhaps already acquired the skills that other hostellites in their teens and twenties were practising; although she habitually wore a long *abaya* and *niqab* during her stay the hostel, photos on her camera roll from a few years before showed her exquisitely coiffed and made-up, standing confidently in shopping malls and university classes. However, she still spoke authoritatively to other, younger hostellites about the importance of being 'groomed'. In their bedroom one evening, as we all sat together, Malalai spoke in an older-sisterly tone to seventeen-year-old Ambaa, who was preparing for entrance to medical college.

"You should make yourself *groomed*," Malalai was saying. "It is not too early. In six or eight years your marriage will happen. You must find information about diets on YouTube, and learn how to take care of your skin, to do make up and to dress well. You must drink hot water with lemon first thing in the morning, and do not eat rice or bread - that will help you lose weight."

"*Api* (big sister), I have already tried this," Ambaa said meekly. She sat looking trustingly into Malalai's face, nodding earnestly at each suggestion and never objecting to Malalai's right to criticise her appearance so thoroughly.

"Then you should do exercise," Malalai declared, changing tack. "Every day, after *fajr*, you should walk one hundred times on the roof. Then you should do some exercise in your room, *stretching, plank*, yoga…"

"I want to try yoga, it is very good," chipped in Tabassum.

"We should all go to the gym to do exercise," announced Malalai, leaning forward enthusiastically. "We should be doing exercise that makes us sweat - that is how you lose weight. That is how you become *groomed*."

Grooming, practice and being ready

This chapter explores the importance assigned by girls to appearance and 'grooming' during their time living in hostels. Literature on middle-class cultures emphasises the importance of appearance, beauty, fashion and consumption to both the performance and experience of middle-class identities. Brosius sees the ability to consume and participate in cultures of beauty and wellness as an essential part of middle-classness (Brosius 2010:16), while Dickey argues that knowing how to consume is part of middle classness (Dickey 2016:16) and Liechty (Liechty 2003:117) argues that in Nepal, 'doing fashion' allows people to set themselves apart from some and signal commonality with others. Fashion and appearance thus become aspects of habitus, the 'systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures' (Bourdieu 2010:72) that influence understandings and performances of social class identities.

In this chapter, I show how the space of the hostel becomes a site for the inculcation of aesthetic labour, expressed through idioms of practice, grooming and becoming 'ready'.

Greater access to spaces of consumption in urban centres, combined with girls' increased autonomy over leisure, mobility and appearance and a popular conceptualisation of the hostel as a space of preparation, mark hostel residence as a convenient time for the acquisition of beauty skills. Developing such skills, however, is not an unproblematic activity. Becoming groomed is a time-consuming process which individuals run the risk of getting wrong by displaying incompetence; it is also a process which can involve significant hardship in the form of financial outlay, time commitment and bodily pain. The constant awareness of critical observation and judgement, described by Dickey as 'the sense both of being caught in the middle and of being on stage, surrounded by a highly judgmental social audience' (2016:132) meant that grooming, like other aspects of middle-class identity, can be experienced in terms of both pleasure and anxiety. Finally, the subjective nature of beauty means that hostel girls who have committed significant time, money and effort into their appearance may still be judged adversely and experience humiliation as a result. The difficulty of becoming groomed evidences the contested nature of learning as an activity. While the hostel becomes a site for the acquisition of specific skills, such skills are not uncritically accepted as desirable or valued.

Residents of the hostel consistently used three terms when discussing issues of appearance and beauty: 'grooming', 'practice' and being 'ready'. The English words for all three terms were used in conversations otherwise conducted entirely in Urdu. All three terms carried the connotation of labour and expending effort towards one's appearance, recalling Bordo's writing on technologies of the body (1993), and of aesthetic labour (Elias et al. 2017), the work involved in crafting and attending to one's appearance in order to 'look good and sound right' (Warhurst & Nickson 2001). However, rather than assimilating the terms to ideas extant in the literature, I tried to approach them as their own right as

indigenous analytic categories, seeking to understand them in terms of their contextual usage.

Practising

I mainly heard the word ‘practice’ used in connection with make-up application. Girls repeatedly ‘practised’ applying make-up to their faces. The practice that they engaged in was rarely for a specific occasion - although girls would sometimes apply make-up to go out to a restaurant or to go shopping, their sessions of practice most often culminated in washing off the make-up without having ever left their room. I know that several of the residents of my hostel engaged in these practice sessions, because some of them showed me the photos they took of themselves, but I do not know where the inspiration came from for the ‘looks’ that they tried out. Tabassum was the only person that I knew watched video tutorials on make-up techniques, but others may have done the same in the privacy of their own rooms. Certainly, I never heard girls discuss videos or tutorials with each other.

Contained in the word ‘practice’ is the expectation of a future wherein expertise will be useful. Practice was a way to acquire the skill and knowledge of make-up application so that when girls attended an event for which make-up wearing was expected, they would know what to do. A future gaze was anticipated that would carefully scrutinise their appearance, and for which girls would need to prepare themselves. The events where such scrutiny was anticipated were typically family occasions such as weddings. Hostellites also occasionally attended events at work or their universities for which they dressed up and applied make up. These were events which were more everyday and which required a less dramatic, but still labour-intensive, made-up appearance.

Although a gaze in the future is anticipated, the current moment of practising for hostel girls was one of little to no scrutiny. Girls applied make-up to their own bodies, in the privacy of their own rooms, and then removed it without exposing it to an external gaze. Indeed, the hostel may have been regarded as a good place to 'practise' because, as a space removed from homes where girls had little private space, in the hostel girls had the opportunity to acquire cosmetics and experiment with looks without the fear of being judged. As Gastmeier notes, experiencing freedom from an external gaze can make an act that is usually considered to be oriented towards a viewer 'an individualised, private form of exercise, geared towards strengthening oneself physically and emotionally [and] [f]ocused on self-fashioning rather than the male gaze' (Gastmeier 2016:40). Although rooms in our hostel were typically shared by two, three or four residents, my sense was that women wanting to practise still found ways to be alone, even when living with a roommate. I often returned to our room to find Tabassum 'practising', she having started while I was out, while the photos Samayya had showed me had all been taken during the day when her roommate Zakiya was away at work. This suggests that solitude was important for both these women who were 'practising' applying make-up. For Samayya, who was often alone in the hostel during the day since many of her classes took place in the evening, 'practice' could have been a way to fill time, and to compensate for solitude; for Tabassum, who worked long hours in the hospital six or seven days in the week, 'practice' might have been a way to claw back some time for herself, a kind of retaliatory staying up (Liang 2020). 'Practice' might have been a way to compensate for solitude, or a way to explore the possibilities of being alone.

'Practice' offered opportunities for exploration and experimentation. While applying make-up, smoothing powders and creams sensuously over one's own skin, can be a form of

self-care and investment in one's own wellbeing and worth, the application of make-up can also offer the possibility to imagine different ways of being, even different personhoods. The photos that Samayya took of herself when she was 'practising' were strikingly romantic, glamorous shots. Her thick hair tumbled down her shoulders in stark contrast to the neat plait or the scarf she usually wore, and her lips curved into a bright smile highlighted by the magenta lipstick. She had evidently trialled different sources of lighting, moving closer to the window for the benefit of natural light and experimenting with black-and-white and highly saturated filters. These images of Samayya were very different to the gentle, self-effacing young woman that I knew, who spoke in a soft voice and rarely put herself forward. 'Practice' appeared not just to be an instrumental, unemotional acquisition of skills, but an opportunity to imagine a different present, or to dream of a different future.

The implications of this practice, however, are that the people practicing are by nature deficient and in need of remedial work. In the videos that Tabassum watched, the goal of the cosmetic application was to arrive at a normatively beautiful appearance, with shadows and highlights applied to create the impression of an oval-shaped, high-cheekboned face. As Otis notes in her fieldwork among beauty workers in China, 'the cosmetics themselves… invoked deficiencies of appearance. The central lesson learned was that appearance could always, indeed should always, be enhanced' (Otis 2016:169). Even leaving aside the deficiencies invoked in physical appearance, the idea of 'practice' is posited on a construction of hostel girls as deficient in skill. Against the backwardness of the towns and villages from which hostel girls come to the city, the metropolis was conversely imagined as a space in which one could become groomed through the necessity of interaction with non-kin others and urban experience. 'Practice' was a way to acquire some of the external markers of a confident, urban femininity and dispel the traces of the backwards areas.

Through repeated practice, girls acquired the steadiness of hand and the aesthetic judgment to replicate the 'looks' diligently studied via YouTube tutorial videos and peer examples. By practising, they inculcated both the techniques required to embody a confident, styled and urban femininity, encapsulated in the concept of being 'groomed'.

Being groomed

Being 'groomed' was a widespread and normative ambition among hostel girls, intrinsic to the development of a sophisticated, confident and urbane middle-class femininity. Although girls struggled to define what it meant to be 'groomed' when I asked, they were able to identify it in another by the way that she moved, dressed or spoke, indicating its status as an acquired disposition or orientation to the world rather than a discrete attribute that can be regarded separately from other aspects of one's character.

'Grooming' connoted a confident middle-class status through projecting a professional, educated persona of someone who could deal confidently with strangers and 'talk to anyone'. Grooming also evidenced a discriminating ability to consume through the ability to signify class through aesthetic appearance and interpersonal relationships. Dickey notes the centrality of appearance to class in her comment that, in India, 'A person who fails to display key material good not only is unrecognisable and invisible but, in crucial social ways, does not exist' (2016:78). The 'showcase exterior' (Dickey 2016:79) that presents the self in particular ways, and which involves the expenditure of aesthetic labour (Elias, Gill and Scharff 2017: 26), is essential to the successful habitation of a middle-class identity.

The need to appear groomed motivated women to give each other advice and admonishments about their appearance. Some of this I experienced directly. Once, when I

was standing on the roof enjoying the winter sun, Zakiya approached me and said in a concerned tone: “Yasmeen, you really need to get your face threaded, and you also should use a facewash on your nose for blackheads. And why don’t you dress more fashionably? You always dress very plainly.” The mother of one of my friends told me kindly: “Child, your hair is very thin at the sides. You must apply oil to it and onion juice to make it grown thicker. And your lips are very dry. Why do you not apply Vaseline? And why do you not have your arms waxed, that will make you more *groomed*.” I was embarrassed and annoyed by these frank comments, which made me feel extremely self-conscious. Gradually, however, I understood that the advice Zakiya and my friend’s mother were giving me were intended not only kindly, but protectively. They wanted me to dress and present myself as more sophisticated, because they saw a mismatch between my personal appearance and my identity as a rich foreigner. By prompting me to present myself in a more styled and considered way, they were trying to ensure that I would be read or perceived as more important and worthy of respect.

Being groomed was essential for successfully inhabiting class status, giving respect to others as well as receiving it (Karademir-Hazir 2020; Macdougall 2015). This seemed to be the motivation for Zakiya’s criticism of Tabassum one day, whose lack of grooming meant she failed to embody her professional status sufficiently enough. “You need to be more *groomed* for people to know you are a doctor,” Zakiya informed Tabassum, who looked repentant and receptive. “Like Rabieh and Rukhsana [two other trainee doctors living in our hostel]. Look at them. They wear simple clothes, but you can tell that they are doctors.” Less than two weeks later, Tabassum went shopping and returned with ready-made clothes bought from ‘branded’ high-street stores. As she showed me her purchases, she justified the

cost: “In Lahore you have to pay attention to your clothing. Girls here are very brand-conscious. And in my job, I have to look *groomed*.”

The aesthetic labour of hostel girls involved attention to clothing, make-up, body shape and skin condition. Clothing, as a marker of being ‘groomed’, related both to middle-class consumption practices and to an exercised skill at sartorial labour and self-presentation. ‘Branded’ clothing from high-street-named shops, bought ready-made rather than made to order by a tailor, was connected with being groomed; such clothing was purchased at shopping malls or shopping centres, and was rather more expensive than clothing made by a relative or a local tailor, connecting to the link between aesthetic labour and middle-class consumption practices.

The simple purchase of ‘branded’ clothing, however, was not enough to render one groomed. The presentation of oneself as groomed also required skill and labour, the ability to present oneself well and to look polished through having clean, smart and unrumpled clothes that matched well and created a harmonious outfit. Cohering with Dickey’s observation of the importance of clean and unwrinkled clothing for the performance of decency and middle-class status (2016:129), hostel girls would spend hours each week ironing their outfits on the one, broken-legged ironing board in the hostel. Girls also invested time in selecting and coordinating items in their outfit to give the impression of a coherent single outfit, rather than individual items combined (Frøystad 2006). Tabassum, for example, had five different watches, all with a different coloured strap, which she would match to an element of her outfit. She would pair individually-bought dupattas with ready-made kurtas while attending to the matching and contrasting colours in each, and would often ask my opinion: would a purple kurta with green and silver embroidery would look better with a soft peach dupatta that toned with the main colour of the kurta, or with a blue-

and-silver dupatta that picked up the colours of the embroidery? When she bought a new item, a kurta or a pair of trousers, she would often enumerate all the other clothes that she possessed that she could wear with it to create an outfit.

Giving off the impression of having well-matching outfits that made up a single outfit was a triumph, as was selecting non-branded clothing that due to its attractiveness could be mistakenly identified as 'branded'. One evening, when Zakiya came back from working wearing a kurta she had bought for 500 rupees from the local store, she grinned cheekily when I told her I liked her shirt. "My colleagues also liked it! One asked me, 'Did you get this from Khaadi?'…I said 'Yes.'" She doubled over, chuckling at her own cleverness, and slapped my hand. For Zakiya, part of the triumph came from having her outfit read as from an expensive shop, when it had cost far less.

Even if one's clothes were read as groomed, one could fail to be sufficiently groomed by wearing them in an ungroomed way, by the way one's body filled them out. Wearers of clothes filled out too much by a voluptuous body, like Ambaa's, or that hung on a thin, fragile frame like Zakiya's, were considered ungroomed, and the possessors of those frames were expected to labour on their bodies. One way this labour was performed was through one's relationship to and intake of food, as Malalai's urging of Ambaa to deny her seventeen-year-old body food suggests. Another way was through exercise. For a few months during my fieldwork I joined a gym, whose clientele were predominantly hostel girls from the local neighbourhood. The gym owner, a self-possessed woman who had competed for Pakistan in a former Olympics, asked me when I came in to join: "What do you want to work on? What are you looking to change?" As I hesitated, unsure of her meaning, she looked me up and down consideringly and said: "I don't think you really need to lose weight. But you could reduce your bust. Girls often come in to work on a body part, maybe

they want their bust to go from 34 to 32. I can show you some exercises to reduce your bust." Humiliated, I declined being shown the exercise as politely as I could. Whenever I visited the gym in following months, however, I noticed that one of the machines was always in use - a 'waist trainer' with a turning base, upon which one could stand and rapidly twist from side to side, in the hope of whittling's one's waist away. Exercise was a method for working upon a body unruly in its measurements or proportions, rendering it docile and compliant with the vision of a groomed ideal.

Using make-up was another indication of women who were groomed. The most admiring appellations of 'groomed'-ness were attached to girls who wore make-up, and groomed women wore make-up in a style that I came to recognise as somewhat formulaic. A groomed woman had smooth, clear and unblemished skin, ideally light in tone, if not by nature then through the application of a whitening base. Celebrations such as weddings required a full face of make-up, but lipstick and blusher were considered sufficient for wearing every day. On an everyday basis, women in my hostel with claims towards being 'groomed' wore lipstick in a bright, definite colour and blusher, and sometimes kajal on the waterline of the eyes. Far from the 'natural' look of interest to young women in Kolkata (Sur 2017), the colours of the makeup stood out on her face, too bright to be taken by an observer as natural, and therefore evidencing her skill at make-up application, rendering labour 'a hypervisible display of gender and class competence' (Otis 2016:156). The element of skill required for applying makeup in the right way also entailed the possibility of getting grooming wrong, by not having enough make-up or having too much, or applying the right sort of make-up on skin which was blemished by acne or undesirably dark in tone.

Grooming could also be got wrong by its interaction with a competing moral register (Schielke 2009) of piety, expressed visibly through consumption (Maqsood 2017). While

visible piety and attention to appearance have sometimes been constructed as mutually exclusive (Menon 2005), hostel girls in Lahore did not consider the two things necessarily incompatible. Grooming was proposed as a way of displaying and performing piety, an extension of the good practices of wearing clean clothes and perfuming oneself for prayer. Sakeena Auntie, who taught the hostellite *dars* classes, advocated attention to personal appearance as a way to perform piety and make Islam seem attractive to others - "If you look attractive and groomed you attract others towards religion." Wearing *niqab* and *abayas* could signal class location through the quality of the fabric and the taste of the wearer, and attention to grooming as a wearer of *niqab* was considered entirely compatible with piety (Jones 2010; Tarlo 2010). Without wishing to dramatise a tension between piety and appearance, however, I do note that Malalai attributed her difficulty in finding a job to her wearing of an *abaya* and *niqab.* She watched YouTube videos about the obligation to wear *hijab,* worrying - "companies want you to look groomed", she said mournfully. She prayed the *dua-e-istikhara*, a prayer performed by Muslims when seeking God's guidance on a particular matter (Haeri 2021), as to whether she should continue to wear the *hijab*. When Tabassum, who also wore the *niqab,* won a prize for being the best house officer of her year, Malalai was thrilled to learn that one of the categories in which Tabassum had been assessed was that of being 'best-dressed'. "Tabassum, you have shown them that girls who wear *hijab* can be the best-dressed! I'm so happy!" Malalai said proudly. She seemed to me to be encouraged by Tabassum's victory - as if she felt that her future might not be circumscribed by her decision to wear *niqab*.

Getting grooming right

Being groomed required discriminating judgment, skill and labour. Zakiya's triumph with the shirt she bought that was read as so much more expensive than it was also points to the skill of consumption around being groomed - spending too much money (although 'too much' was never specified) was a fault, indicating someone who was not groomed. A groomed woman was one who could resolve multiple demands and make it appear effortless, but the appearance of effortlessness itself required significant labour.

Tabassum expressed this one evening, after we had been shopping together. Tabassum was earning a wage for the first time in her year as a house officer, and we returned to the hostel exhausted and laden with bags. Tabassum called for tea to be brought to our room and, as we rested our feet and sipped the rejuvenating tea, she unpacked each bag and showed me the items that she had bought. She had bought two new dupattas, one white and one peach, and had had them hemmed by a tailor in Icchra; she had bought herself a new pair of flat shoes, a kurta made of a thick denim material, a new watch, and a handbag as a present for her mother. Although I had seen them all as she had selected them, she showed them to me again and described how she planned to wear them and how she would combine them with clothes she already owned.

Tabassum was pleased with her purchases, and I played my part by commenting warmly on every item and saying that Tabassum had chosen well. But she was also doubtful. Surveying the bags spread out on her bed, she sighed heavily and said:

"Yasmeen, do you think this is a burden on us, that we do our own shopping and take care of ourselves? I think that it is a burden. When we live with our parents they take care of what we need. My mother is a very good bargainer. She knows what we have, what we need, she is a good shopper, because she has a lot of experience. I never used to buy

anything when I was a student because I was dependent on my parents, I didn't want to spend their money. Now I am earning, but knowing what I should buy, what I need, is difficult."

Tabassum put away her shopping, hanging the dupattas carefully on a hanger, placing the shoes in the bottom of her wardrobe, and folding the kurta to fit on a shelf. She phoned her mother and told her what she had bought, describing each item as she had described it to me just a few minutes before. When she concluded the call, she was still thoughtful. She said, as she finished putting her new clothes away:

"Actually, it's very important to have good clothes. Because people judge you. When I was in medical school, I used to wear *abaya,* so it didn't matter what I wore. I only wore other clothes in the hostel, and I could wear what I wanted. But now, patients will judge you, based on how you are dressed. People will judge you. So we need to be *ready*."

Being 'ready'

Repeated practice and preparation were hoped to lead to the state of being 'ready', although being 'ready' meant different things in different contexts. In some conversations, being 'ready' was used to describe being viewable, presentable to an external gaze without warning or preparation. Tabassum's brother, for example, encouraged her to wear her hair styled and apply make-up everyday, and to wear contact lenses instead of her habitual glasses. "He wants me always to be looking *ready*," Tabassum told me, giggling, almost bridling at the idea. "He says no matter who comes, I should be looking *ready*." 'Ready' here suggested a level of grooming which become naturalised, not conscious, such that the object of the gaze is constantly ready to view.

While being ‘ready’ as an object of gaze derived from the expectations of women, the need for ‘readiness’ in a wider sense also speaks to the increased expectations of women as a result of the expansion in labour force opportunities, which have not been accompanied by any rescaling of gendered expectations of men and which have resulted in the need for women to carry out multiple shifts of labour (Hochschild & Machung 1997). Gilbertson notes how ‘modern women’ in Hyderabad, India are increasingly expected to be attractive, professionally employed and ideal cooks and homemakers who ‘are able to “do anything”’ (Gilbertson 2018:129–130), and this pressure was also experienced by hostel girls in the need to be ‘ready’ to deal with an uncertain future. Girls in the hostel were living lives very different to those of their mothers and even their older cousins, living away from their families in city hostels while working and studying. Samayya was the first in her extended family to go to Lahore to study, and she dreamed of having a professional job, learning English, and one day studying abroad for a Ph.D. At the same time, the patriarchal conditions of workplaces and the demands of future marital homes meant that hostel girls might be living a much more domestic life in a few years. Many of the possibilities open to Samayya came from the fact that her husband, to whom she had been married before starting her undergraduate studies, was working abroad in Dubai and at present their living together was not possible. If he were to return to Pakistan, she would have to move to wherever he was and take responsibility for running the household, even if it made her study and work impossible. What the next few years held for Samayya was very unclear, and being ‘ready’ was essential to navigate this uncertainty.

“I think girls need to be good at everything,” Tabassum mused to me one day, when she had been doing her usual ‘practice.’ “If we have to cook, we should be able to cook; if we have to go to some function or some wedding, we should know how to be ready for that.”

Tabassum's ponderings encapsulated the complex situation she was in during the year we lived together in the same hostel. Having completed her undergraduate medical degree, she was now in her 'house officer' year at the hospital, and her parents were looking for marriage proposals for her. Tabassum's qualifications, physical appearance and housewifely skills would all be evaluated at meetings with potential in-laws. Tabassum, meanwhile, was hoping to sit the medical Part 1 exam the next year and wanted to train as a paediatric specialist, but she knew that the possibility of doing so depended completely on the outcome of the marriage proposals her parents were coordinating. The marriage that would eventually be arranged would completely determine where she would live, with whom and whether it would be possible for her to continue with her career at all. The need that she saw for girls 'to be good at everything' was premised on the fundamental unknowability and precarity of the future for women, and the need to be prepared for whatever might come.

Getting 'ready' for the captain's mother: preparation and pain

The need for Tabassum to be 'ready' came early in her house officer year, a few months into our living together in the hostel. Word came from her home that her parents were speaking to the parents of a prospective groom. It was the first time in Tabassum's family that an alliance was being considered outside of the extended family. Until now, marriages had always taken place within the kin network, and Tabassum said wistfully that these kinds of marriages were better because "You know who you are marrying - you have grown up together and you know their family and their habits." In Tabassum's generation of cousins, however, there appeared to be no eligible match for her, and her parents had therefore been looking more widely. A family of the same region and ethnicity, whose son was a captain in the Pakistani army, had approached them. Over the phone, Tabassum was told that the

mother and family of the groom would be coming to the family home in the village in a few weeks. Tabassum would need to be there, to meet them and for them to see her in person and consider her as a bride for their son, and before she went home, Tabassum needed to make herself ready to be seen. What followed was a considerable number of episodes of pain, brought about through the process of becoming 'ready'.

The most significant preparation for readying herself was surgical. Tabassum, who had worn glasses correcting her short sight since she was a teenager, would have laser eye surgery before the meeting. It was her father's idea - from his point of view, glasses were undesirable for a girl and removing them would increase Tabassum's attractiveness as a candidate for marriage. The cost of the operation was therefore an investment in her future. Tabassum seemed reluctant. When I asked her how she felt about having the operation, she said that: "I want that my father should invest his money somewhere else." She felt it was an unnecessary expenditure on his part and regretted that she would be the cause of further expense for him. But her father was insistent and sent her the money for the operation.

And so, about a month before her trip home, Tabassum rearranged her shifts at the hospital so that she could make the four-hour journey to Islamabad from Lahore, have the procedure done in a hospital there, and travel back to Lahore in time for her next shift. The operation left her eyes stinging, sore and sensitive, but she had no time left to recover from the operation before she went back to her work; she received very little holiday allowance, and if she were to take sick leave, she told me, her pay would be docked. Although she was physically tired from the demands of having to travel to a different city, having a surgical procedure, and then travelling back to go straight to work, she carried her small bottle of eye drops with her to refresh her stinging, sore eyes, slept as much as she could in between shifts, and dragged her tired body between the hostel and the hospital. Tabassum's body, her

tiredness, her sore eyes, was compelled to fit around her workplace, the surgery, and the expectations of a potential bride, because her tired and suffering body was more labile than those inflexible structures.

Preparation for the meeting with the captain's family also required intervention just before her trip home. The weekend before she left, Tabassum told me: "Today I am going to get my waxing done in the parlour. Will you come with me?" I agreed straight away; I had passed the beauty parlours in the neighbourhood, of which there were at least five, many times but had never been in, and I was interested to visit one and see what it was like inside. I had also been feeling very self-conscious about my appearance since Zakiya's concerned advice, and I thought I might take the opportunity to get my own waxing done. Another hostellite, Maha who came from Faisalabad, decided to come with us too.

The three of us left the hostel, wrapping ourselves in chadors and covering our heads with dupattas for the short walk through the streets of the colony. The roads were unpaved and bumpy and without pavements for pedestrians, so we picked our way carefully through the ruts and puddles of the Lahore winter rain from the night before, till we got to the parlour.

The parlour we went to was called Aafireen Parlour. It was just around the corner from our own hostel, and was one of at least five in the neighbourhood, all attached to or operating out of a hostel. Outside on the street was a poster showing a very fair-skinned woman, heavily made up and wearing jewellery suitable for a wedding. The entrance to the parlour itself, however, wasn't clear. As I looked around for a sign or a shopfront, Tabassum pushed open the metal gate of a small courtyard with a set of stairs in it, and a door. The stairs led up to the hostel and the unmarked door opened into a ground floor room with a

counter facing the door. This was the parlour. The windows looking onto the street were painted over, so the room was lit solely by unenthusiastic electric light. Mirrors against one wall were placed in front of two treatment chairs, and rudimentary partitions separated other areas of the room to make areas for more exposing treatments to take place. The room was dark and somewhat dingy. Black and Sharma note that aesthetic differences in the layout and design of parlours in the UK related to the class of clientele, and that more functional and instrumental salons generally serve a less middle-class clientele whereas salons targeting a more affluent and middle-class market strive to emphasise their therapeutic competencies and aim to create the feel of a clinic (Black & Sharma 2001:112). The style and atmosphere of the parlours near our hostel could therefore be related to the clientele of the area, primarily students and hostel residents without much money to spare.

Beauty parlours, as sites for body work and aesthetic labour, have been explored in various contexts (Furman 1997; Ossman 2002; Sharma 2019; Sharma & Black 2001), and a theme often emerging from these studies is about the parlour as a site of affective labour, focused on making customers feel good about themselves, as well as a source of care and community formation. Rupal describes a salon in South Delhi where upon entering she felt 'instantly comfortable' (Rupal 2002), while Anjum Hasan's poem 'Afternoon in the Beauty Parlour' (1999:35) establishes an image of a space of nurture and replenishment:

> …here, in this small saloon, where the sunlit dust
> enhances the drowsy hum of distant traffic,
> where jealousy, men and untruthful mirrors are denied entrance,
> is genuine sisterhood established.

The salon that I went to with Maha and Tabassum, however, was not a space to linger or indulge oneself. The atmosphere was purposeful and utilitarian. Three workers, young

women whose outfits of baggy t-shirts and leggings reflected the active nature of their labour, were tense and swift in their movements, moving with an urgency and pace dictated by the short appointment times. Their interactions with customers were brusque and to the point. When a customer came in, a worker would ask: "What job do you need (*Kya kam chaiyye*)?" The customer would be directed tersely either to sit and wait, or to come through immediately to the work area. There were usually a number of women waiting or being treated at any one time, and the treatments were performed swiftly and with a minimum of conversation.

Tabassum went first. She told the woman that she wanted her eyebrows, face (upper lip, chin and neck) threaded, and her fingers, arms, legs and toes waxed. The threading was done first. I sat on a dusty leather chair by the door with Maha while Tabassum went to the treatment chair. She sat with her back to us, and Kajal, the worker, leaned over her. Kajal placed the end of a thread loop in her mouth to keep the thread taut and rapidly moved the twisted loop back and forth over Tabassum's face. From behind, I could see Tabassum's body occasionally jerking. Twice she lifted her hand, gesturing for Kajal to step back so that she could wipe her eyes. Her back was to me the whole time, and Kajal's position over her body blocked her reflection in the mirror. Tabassum had become an inert form in the chair, a site upon which beauty could be performed.

Maha, sitting next to me, was carefully reading a printed list of treatments and considering the respective prices. Her cousin's wedding was in two weeks, and she wanted to have her legs and arms waxed and her face and eyebrows threaded. She scrutinised the 'packages' advertised, for various treatments included under one price, and compared them to the prices of the individual treatments. After considering the different treatments, Maha decided that she would come back the following weekend, just before the wedding. "If I

have it done now the hair will start growing back before the wedding and it will be too short. It will be a waste."

As Maha made her decision, Tabassum got up from the treatment chair. She had watering eyes and irritated red patches on her forehead. She sat down next to me and raised her newly-shaped eyebrows in fellow-feeling. She looked both shocked and amused. "It was really painful!" she said. Another worker called Tabassum into the cubicle partitioned off by curtains for waxing, and Kajal beckoned me over to the threading chair.

When I sat in the chair of Aafireen Parlour for the first time, Kajal positioned herself over me and leaned over me in order to get the thread close enough to my face. I felt trapped in the chair, held in place by Kajal's body. She loomed over me and leaned her weight against my shoulders, pressing down to hold me in place. The sensation of having the hair ripped from my skin was savage, a sharp pain. It made my eyes water and I involuntarily flinched. Kajal spoke harshly, telling me: "Keep still," as she leaned more heavily onto my shoulders. She told me to pull the skin under my eyebrow taut with my hand to make it easier to thread; she repeated sharply, "Pull your skin tighter. Tighter. It's not tight enough. Do it more. Use your other hand." When I failed to pull it tightly enough, Kajal called Maha, still sitting on the leather chair by the door, over and told her to pull tightly on the skin under my eyebrow. Maha's fingers pushed down forcefully on my closed eyelid and I felt trapped and panicky. I couldn't shake the feeling that she was pushing down on my eyeball and was going to damage my eye. I had a wild fear that she might put her finger right through my closed eyelid.

When the threading was finished, I looked at myself in the mirror. My skin was red and angry, and my eyes were watering freely. Kajal pointed me towards a second cubicle, where

another worker told me to take off my shalwar before she scraped hot wax from an urn over one leg at a time. She used a metal table knife and applied the wax with the serrated side, scraping it vigorously on my skin. I felt like a slice of bread upon which she was spreading butter. The waxing was less painful than the threading, but performed at speed, with no discussion or conversation. There was no pleasure or indulgence about the treatment at all.

In the days after that trip to the parlour, I was surprised every time that I saw myself in the mirror. My eyebrows looked sleeker and more uniform, but strangely anonymous, as if they didn't belong on my face. The skin on my face bore angry red scratches where it had been caught by the thread. They scabbed over and became dark red marks, painfully obvious on my skin. My legs itched irritatingly as the hair that had been ripped from them grew back, and at night I couldn't sleep for the prickling discomfort on my limbs. At the same time, my friends complimented the change in my appearance. "You look better," said Zakiya approvingly.

Pain and beauty: physical violence and symbolic violence

The trip with Tabassum to the beauty parlour emphasised for me the lived connection between beauty and the experience of pain. The treatments to which Tabassum and I voluntarily committed ourselves were physically uncomfortable and even fear-provoking, as I felt momentarily concerned about my own bodily integrity. The treatments left our bodies marked with bruises and scratches and our eyes red and watering with shock. For the experience of this violence and its consequences we paid money and limped home, shielding our bruised faces with our shawls.

I want to consider the role of pain in experiences of beauty for two reasons. Firstly, I think it is a useful way to bring 'the body corporeal - fleshy, feeling, embodied' (Elias et al. 2017:8) into considering how beauty is lived, avoiding the tendency that Elias et al. note in some studies for figuring the body as 'a cultural "site" in which power and discourses of femininity play out, leaving some to argue that the body itself "disappears" in these accounts (Elias et al. 2017: 8). Secondly, in attending to the experience of pain I am not only following what was a significant part of my own experience of 'beauty work' during fieldwork, but a theme that I have subsequently noticed in fiction and nonfiction writing from South Asia about beauty. The popular platforms of Feminism in India, Buzzfeed India and Mangobaaz in Pakistan regularly feature stories of the physical discomfort of gendered body work, while several of the stories submitted explore the painful experiences of beauty work. Sara Khan's 2020 submission 'Hairy', for the Pakistan-based Zeenat Haroon Rashid Competition for women writers, vividly evokes both the intimacy of laser hair removal and the bodily experience of the treatment:

> [the doctor] has a machine that uses air to cool the skin he targets with the laser….You can feel the pressure of his thumb steadying your jaw, smell the acrid smoke from the singed hair. He's moving too quickly for the air to actually cool anything, and you can feel the stinging multiply in white hot pinpricks, like so many rubber bands flicking your skin in rapid succession.
>
> He gives you no warning when he moves the beam to the soft flesh above your lip, and you feel yourself suddenly unable to breathe - there is too much air. It's like a hurricane trying to force its way into your skull, the cold air rushing up your nostrils at a frightening velocity making you gasp and kick like you're drowning. He doesn't stop, but he doesn't linger longer than he has to. He might not even have noticed. When your lungs refill, the smell of burnt hair is stronger than ever.
>
> (Khan 2020:7)

The link between beauty and pain has been well-discussed in feminist theory (Bordo 1993; Davis 1991; Wolf 1991), and a number of scholars have sought to contextualise

women's adoption of bodily painful treatments in terms of the social structures that forcefully direct their apparent choice. Fahs' teaching experiments with women students who purposefully grew their body hair demonstrated the often-violent consequences of breaching expectations of feminine appearance (Fahs 2013), while Davis considers women's willingness to undergo cosmetic surgical procedures, which are by nature painful and can be potentially life-threatening, as rational responses to patriarchal social norms:

> …cosmetic surgery might be a way for some women within the limitations of their present situation to end their suffering. When viewed against this backdrop, the decision could conceivably become a moment of triumph-a moment when a woman turns the tables and does something to help herself.
>
> (Davis 1991:23)

Although Davis effectively highlights the agency of women choosing to undergo cosmetic surgery, I think that her emphasis on the rationality of this choice misses the affective pleasure of playing with beauty that Zakiya, Ambaa, Tabassum and Samayaa experienced in altering their appearance through make up, and the extent to which power holds good by producing things and inducing pleasure (Foucault 1979). Furthermore, Davis' emphasis on the self-directed nature of the choice made by women electing to have cosmetic surgery – 'a moment when a woman overcomes all opposition and does something entirely and irrevocably for herself' (Davis 1991: 35) - does not account for the importance of interpersonal relationships in questions of beauty, such as the concern that Tabassum's father felt about her glasses in relation to a prospective engagement, or the families and partners whose responses to Fahs' women students' growing body hair included disgust and threatened violence (Fahs 2013: 175).

Davis, however, goes on to consider where the limits to 'suffering for "beauty's sake"' may be drawn, and asks how we decide 'how much suffering is fair. Should some women

have to endure so much more pain than other women because of their appearance?' (Davis 1991: 38). Davis' comparison of the burden borne by different women creates the opportunity for a postcolonial consideration of beauty. Thinking about beauty in relation to global hierarchies of race, capital and imperialism allows us to identify the symbolic violence that accompanies the tangible violence of body work and the unequal burden borne by different women. The ubiquity of hair removal among South Asian, women whose hair is naturally abundant, is one example of the symbolic violence attached to beauty; another example is the value attached to light skin. Pale skin was considered the most beautiful, and darker-skinned women bore the brunt of this. Zakiya, whose skin was naturally darker than some of her friends, was extremely self-conscious about being in pictures. She always used powder and foundation to lighten her skin, as well as a skin-lightening cream. The prejudice in favour of lighter skin was even built into technology, as I discovered when I first used the camera on the first mobile phone I bought in Pakistan. The camera function came with an automatic 'beauty' setting between 1 and 10, which was pre-set to 5 and which, when I turned the camera on myself, artificially lightened my skin and eye colour. Other girls had this setting on their phones too, and Malalai used digital filters to give herself blue eyes, unnaturally pale-looking skin and a cartoonishly heart-shaped face.

The aftermath of meeting the captain's mother

Tabassum was closer to the normative standard of beauty than some of our friends. She was tall and 'fair' according to colourist standards, and after her laser eye surgery she no longer had to wear glasses. But the family of the potential groom did not offer a proposal. His mother, sister and aunt came to the house and met her, but they went away afterwards without agreeing to the match. In the days that followed, her family waited for word in vain.

Back in Fahmida Hostel, Tabassum sat on the floor of our room, eating nuts, and told Zakiya, Samayya and me about the meeting. The mother of the proposed groom had come to the house, along with several other members of the family. “The auntie was nice, and his sister was very nice. But the mother was very strange,” Tabassum reflected. “She asked me a lot of questions like ‘Do you know how to cook? Do you know how to take care of the house?’ I just said, ‘No.’ My aunt was there, and she said, ‘Her brothers know how to do those things, she doesn’t!’” Tabassum laughed.

“What did his mother say to that?” I asked.

Tabassum shrugged. “She didn’t say anything.”

“It is very difficult on a girl to have to present themselves in front of seventy people,” Zakiya observed. “To stand there with all those eyes on them, and know they are being judged on how they look. It would be better if the match was fixed and then they saw the girl.”

Tabassum cracked another nut. “There were only six people there from his side. His mother, his father, his sister and brother, his auntie and a child. I don’t know whose child.”

“If there were six people there, they were planning to fix the matter that day,” Zakiya said sagely. “If they decided the meeting had gone well, they would have settled the engagement there and then.”

Tabassum looked downcast. She may not have liked the mother, but it clearly wasn’t pleasant to feel rejected, either.

“I don’t understand these kinds of people,” she observed, after a long pause. “All the questions she was asking - can I cook, can I keep house. If she wants that kind of daughter-

in-law, why is she looking for a doctor? She wants a doctor, a model, someone who can keep house and cook. She wants it all in one."

"What did you say when she asked you if you can cook?" Samayya asked.

Tabassum grinned cheekily. "I said, 'No, but I can order food'." She and Zakiya dissolved into laughter and slapped each other's palms. Samayya smiled, looking abashed. Zakiya and Tabassum's laughter had an edge of deliberate naughtiness, a conscious defiance, delighting in thwarting the expectations of girls.

Tabassum was annoyed that she had gone all the way home for such a foolish matter. "She asked me, 'What are your hobbies?' and I said: 'I eat a lot, I watch dramas, I sleep.' I am a doctor! What time does she think I have for hobbies? She asked me, 'Do you go out with friends?' and I said 'Yes, I'm always wandering about' (*mai ghumti rehti hun)*." *Ghumna* (to wander) is an activity generally considered undesirable for women, so Tabassum's actively claiming it had a rebellious edge to it. "And she asked me, 'Do you wear jeans?' and I said 'Yes, I wear jeans.'"

"Did you really say all these things, Tabassum?" I asked, incredulous. I knew that her father disapproved of her wearing jeans, and I was surprised that Tabassum would openly make such statements in front of her family.

"Yes, I said them," Tabassum said firmly.

"Maybe some of the mother's questions came from curiosity," Zakiya suggested. "She may have been thinking 'What is life like in a hostel?'"

Tabassum shrugged dismissively. “She knows I am a doctor. How can she be surprised if I don’t cook, when I have spent so much time in hostels and living away from home? What did she expect?

“And the boy is nothing special either. I have *stalked* him on Facebook. He’s not ugly but he’s nothing special either. Why do they want someone who’s so beautiful and accomplished, when their boy is nothing special? I don’t understand these people’s mentalities.”

Despite Tabassum’s brave face, it was clear that she felt the rejection. Later that night, after Zakiya and Samayya had left, she woke me up in the night to talk. “I can’t sleep,” she told me, coming to sit on the end of my bed. “There is too much going around in my head.” She tucked herself under the foot of my blanket to keep warm and reflected again on her meeting with the captain’s family. “Some people’s mentalities are very strange. I can’t understand them. What do they expect? If they want a daughter-in-law who is a doctor, how do they expect her to cook and know how to manage a house when she has spent the last 10 years learning how to be a doctor?

“I think they were looking for a prettier girl,” Tabassum told me, smiling dismissively. She said mockingly, “Yasmeen, I am not beautiful!”

Although she laughed, the assessment of her had clearly stung. When we got up the next morning and were getting ready for breakfast, Tabassum turned to me apropos of nothing. She stood completely still in the middle of the room, “Yasmeen,” she said, “only I know how rejected I feel.” I crossed the room and hugged her, silently. We went downstairs to breakfast without saying anything more.

Conclusion

Myriem Naji (2012) shows how education is considered to make women weavers in Morocco into moral subjects, but this ethnographic tale from Pakistan shows that the moral subjecthood resulting from particular kinds of learning is not universally accepted. The aesthetic labour that Tabassum underwent before her meeting with the captain's mother, and the practices like wearing jeans and knowing how to order food that marked her as an urbane and groomed young woman, were, she felt, those that impressed the captain's mother unfavourably as unsuitable in a wife for her son. What is more, the evaluation of morality was not unilateral. Tabassum also drew on her own classed habitus and identity as an urban-dwelling and respectable doctor to negatively evaluate the morality of the people whom she felt had rejected her, judging them as backward and insincere.

Tabassum's feeling over the match had been complicated. She had felt trepidation over the consequences of marriage for her career and the degree to which she would be expected to compromise. But the rejection that she felt was humiliating for her, and she linked it to a shortcoming in her own beauty. In the days and weeks following the meeting, Tabassum was quiet and forlorn. Sometimes she would say something that showed she had been turning the rejection over in her head for a long time before that. The experience of rejection, even from a match she was not sure she wanted, was unpleasant for her, and made her feel physically inadequate and undesirable. She saw herself in terms of defect, as unbeautiful. But this in and of itself was also a learning experience for her, a test. The petty indignities and humiliations that she and other hostellites endured, both in the hostel and in their professional and educational spheres, were conceptualised as preparation for an uncertain future in which the ability to manage humiliation, indignity and pain would be

essential. This preparation did not involve putting on make-up or buying clothes, but it was nonetheless another form of ‘practice’ and being ‘ready’.

It seemed to me that after the meeting with the captain’s mother, Tabassum increased her own ‘practising’ of make-up application. She spent time most nights watching YouTube make-up tutorials and copying their techniques. She bought a new set of cosmetics, ordering them online and having them delivered to the hostel. While she was so assiduously practising her make-up application, she spoke disparagingly of the ‘mentalities’ of people who put value in looks and consumption. She criticised people who wanted a big dowry at marriage, and people who spent a lot of money on wedding clothes. Other hostellites also entered these conversations, disparaging those people who spent money for show. Over that winter, the typical season for weddings in Pakistan, almost all the hostel residents went home for at least one family wedding. Before they went they would go shopping for an outfit, and when they came back they would show pictures of the wedding party and what they themselves had worn to the wedding reception. These conversations were always marked by a dialogue of figures, as the hostellites discussed what every outfit had cost and disparaged those who had spent excessively. In the estimation of the hostel girls, excessive expenditure demonstrated a lack of sense and correct priorities on the part of big spenders, and their own disapproval was evidence of their more sophisticated priorities. As other literature on the middle class has shown, moderation is conceptualised as a key attribute of middle-class people, whose morality is evidenced by their ability to mediate between excess and lack (Liechty 2003; Maqsood 2017; Dickey 2016; Dickey 2012). Disapproving of excessive expenditure became a marker of class and social capital, another way in which hostel girls demonstrated their claims to being groomed.

Being in the hostel itself was in some ways a source of care to Tabassum at this point. The friendships that she had with Zakiya and Samayya, Malalai, Rabieh and Rukhsana from the hostel, and perhaps me too, were sources of support upon which she could draw. The support she received was not only emotional and mental, as she told others about her experience and received their attentive sympathy, but physical and tangible. It involved practices like applying make-up to each other's faces, as Ambaa did to Zakiya; applying medical drops to each other's eyes, as I did for Tabassum after her laser eye surgery; or oiling other's hair, as Malalai kindly did for me. She ran her fingers gently through my hair and rubbed the oil into my scalp, and I leaned my back against her knees. Acts like these brought about the 'spatial and physical intimacy' (Otis 2016: 169) that Otis describes as engendering a community of intimacy and care among beauty workers in China. Through touch and mutual grooming, we shared each other's bodily pains and mitigated them. Another way in which we supported each other both drew on the element of consumption involved in grooming and challenged it by sharing clothes, jewellery and cosmetics with each other. It was common for friends to lend and borrow each other's items, creating a larger pool of items from which each person could draw in order to put together groomed and stylish matching outfits, and creating an informal circular economy (Otis 2016:171). These practices of sharing offered a muted challenge to the emphasis on consumption that characterising grooming, while also bolstering it through accepting the rationale of displaying status through clothing.

But the point on which I wish to close is an acknowledgement of the episodic and at this point in their lives, sporadic efforts to be groomed. Hostel residents did not live in a perpetual state of readiness. They made the biggest effort on their appearance for when they were about to travel home or to see family; even Zakiya, who wore makeup to work, rarely

visited the parlour between her few trips to her home village. Girls' own schedules of beauty and preparation were dictated at least partially by their own bodies, the rate at which the hair that they wished to have removed grew. They had to wait for the hair to be long enough to remove, and, like Maha, time their trips to the parlour so that the hair did not have time to grow back, but also ensure that their tender skin had time to recover from the ordeal of waxing before they would be under the eyes of kin. Between trips home, girls spaced out their trips to the beauty parlour and let their body hair grow long. In the hostel, girls who wore freshly-ironed *abayas* or careful make-up outside came to the table in pyjamas or old clothes, with unshaped eyebrows and untrimmed body hair. The hostel was a space where girls could escape the gaze of kin, relax the expectations of beauty, and instead experiment with make-up and alternate personhoods, practising for those times when they would again be the objects of gaze.

The episodic nature of beauty for the hostel girls I knew offers another perspective onto the relationship between beauty, as a form of labour, and time (Coleman & Figueroa 2010). While Kaplan understands the work of beauty as a kind of neoliberal becoming oriented to future production (Kaplan 2017:379), Coleman and Figueroa's interlocutors locate beauty in the past and the future, experiencing the present as a sad and unbeautiful moment (Coleman & Figueroa 2010: 358). The relationship to beauty and grooming that I encountered in the hostel was one of deferral. Being groomed was important, and it would be essential in the future to be 'ready.' But through practice, and through relaxing beauty regimes in between the episodes of necessary labour, that future was pushed away. Being groomed would be needed, but not right now, not yet.

Chapter 6: "We make our own place": worlding in the city

This chapter is about what it means to 'world' the self, to conceptually locate oneself in urban, regional, national and international frameworks, and to have a sense of one's place in relation to extra-local fields of belonging and exclusion. I argue that hostel girls develop a sense of themselves and their environments in relation to an imagined wider sphere, via processes of ranking, theorising and judging different kinds of imagined place, lifestyle and being in the world. The ability of individuals to identify themselves as world subjects has been analytically observed in many forms, often in relation to transnational flows of media (Dattatreyan 2020; Smith 2017). In this chapter I concentrate on the importance of the urban landscape of Lahore as an imagined 'world-class' city, the dispositions considered essential for inhabiting the city as an urbane and worldly subject and the aspiration to global success through education as forms of distinctive classed and gendered worlding among hostel girls living in Lahore.

This chapter is an elliptical response to Dipesh Chakrabarty's (2009) call for scholars to provincialise Europe. Chakrabarty notes that in much scholarship, '"Europe" remains the sovereign, theoretical subject of all histories, including the ones we call "Indian," "Chinese," "Kenyan," and so on' (2009:27). To remedy this, he calls for scholars to attend the specific and historical ways that Europe as a category has emerged, in order to document how 'its "reason," which was not always self-evident to everyone, has been made to look obvious far beyond the ground where it originated' (Chakrabarty 2009: 43). My intention in this chapter is to support through ethnographic description Chakrabarty's criticism of the analytical dichotomies that construct Europe as universal and non-Europe as parochial. Rather than directly provincialising Europe as the object of analysis, I aim to show how young women

living in hostels in Lahore are not insular, provincial and locally-bounded - they are world citizens/subjects who are situating themselves in 'imagined worlds' (Appadurai 1990:297) beyond the local. While I draw on eight months of fieldwork in Lahore in writing this chapter, it is central to my argument that Lahore was not the outside edge of these girls' imaginative horizons. Cities are often identified as centres of worlding (Ghertner 2011; Brosius 2010; Fernandes 2006; Simone 2001; Simone 2004) but hostel girls also located themselves, their hometowns, Lahore and Pakistan itself in relation to other imagined spaces, such as the disputed territories glossed as the 'Northern Areas' to the north of Pakistan, an anti-Muslim West, an idealised Middle East or an ambiguously-imagined China. Through these processes of conceptual location girls also shaped their own ways of being and doing, finding modes of personhood that reflected their sense of belonging and precarity in a wider world. Attention to these imagined networks and landscapes upends a view of the Global South as parochial and local, and shows how different parts of the world are intrinsically connected, not just through flows of finance and capital, but also through imagination, aspiration and a dream of global belonging.

While intellectual genealogies of worlding usually ground themselves on Heidegger's *Being and Time* and the importance he places on 'being-in-the-world' (Heidegger et al. 1962), I have found it productive in writing this chapter to engage with writers who explicitly centre questions of colonialism, postcolonialism and the Global South in understandings of what it means to 'world' the self. Among others, I draw upon Aihwa Ong and Ananya Roy's description of worlding as practices of inter-city comparison and referencing (Roy & Ong 2011), Abdoumaliq Simone's description of worlding both as urban experimentation and as a state of being 'cast out' into the world (Simone 2001), and Spivak's formulation of worlding as a practice of centring particular (imperial) visions as the

norm and foreclosing other (indigenous and colonised) perspectives (Spivak 1999). In this chapter I aim to synthesise these different theoretical framings in order to put forward an argument about what it means for young women living in Pakistani hostels to 'world' themselves from their positionalities as aspirationally middle-class, rural-to-urban migrant women, working and studying in an expanding Global South urban context. Girls drew on a consciousness of larger, unseen landscapes and possibilities in imagining futures for themselves that incorporate them into global networks of success. However, these aspirational futures were often thwarted by structural barriers of racism, capitalism and global inequity, demonstrating the limitations of aspirations to the global.

Although I have found it useful to draw upon writings on cosmopolitanism in order to describe particular ways that hostel girls 'world' themselves, I prefer to avoid the term cosmopolitan otherwise in favour of the term worlding. I have two main reasons for making this choice. One is that cosmopolitanism is a term with a long history, frequently carrying with it an approving undertone connoting liberalism, enlightenment, rationality and a European enlightenment ethos. Vertovec and Cohen, for example, posit a cautiously optimistic view that 'the theory and practice of cosmopolitanism have at least the potential to abolish the razor-wired camps, national flags and walls of silence that separate us from our fellow human beings' (Vertovec & Cohen 2002:22). I emphatically disagree with this optimist reading, since my research highlighted how cosmopolitan ways of being involved exclusion and the mobilisation of structural privilege. A separate but related argument against using the term comes from the human-centricity of the idea of cosmopolitanism. Cosmopolitanism often seems to connote a universal human subject who is positioned at the centre of their landscape. Worlding, on the other hand, I find more helpful because of the way that it can be used to emphasise themes of contingency and assemblage, the way that

living together is accomplished through multiple strategies that are not necessarily predicated on human domination and supremacy. For me, this emphasis on contingency and the agential capacity of multiple actors – from smart-phones to international border regimes – is far more helpful in describing the complexities of 'worlding' the self than a blithe assumption of an individual's ability to assume command of their destiny.

This chapter is structured in three sections. First, I show how hostel girls take part in comparison and inter-city referencing as a means of worlding the city and themselves. Second, I describe three modes of being that hostel girls inculcate as a way of navigating the city; leisurely consumption, classed indifference and quiescent cosmopolitanism. Third, I argue that girls aspire towards global futures through educational success, but that they are frequently let down by barriers that prevent them achieving the worlded futures they imagine for themselves.

Worlding through life in the city: inter-referencing and comparison in world-class Lahore

One chilly winter evening, Tabassum and I were walking back to the hostel after having gone out to buy soup and roasted peanuts from a street stall. The evening was cold, but the hot nuts warmed our hands and the hot soup inside us, combined with the exercise of walking, made us pleasantly comfortable. As we strolled along, Tabassum asked contemplatively: "Yasmeen, do you think that Pakistan is a safe country?"

I wasn't sure what to say. "I think in some ways it is safe and some ways it is not safe," I said finally.

Tabassum continued musing as we walked up the street. “I think that Lahore is a safe city, safer than New York or London. The police have worked hard.” She paused to offer me the bag of nuts. “When I first came here, four years ago, it wasn’t safe to go out alone. You couldn’t go out at night. There had been bomb blasts and attacks.”

Tabassum’s question, and the implicit evaluation of Lahore and Pakistan on a global stage, arose from our ambulatory experience of the city and my coincident presence as a foreigner who had lived overseas. In calling up a comparison to London and New York, Tabassum not only framed Lahore as a ‘world-class city’ (Ghertner 2011) but made a favourable evaluation of Lahore in terms that were covertly moral, suggesting an appraisal of respective levels of modernity, infrastructural capacity and even civilisation. Her evaluation of one city against others recalls Ong’s description of worlding as a comparative exercise, brought about through the contrast of cities to each other on global scales. In the collected volume *Worlding Cities*, Ong notes that ‘a striking aspect of Asian urban transformations involves seemingly unavoidable practices of inter-city comparison, referencing, or modeling’ (Ong 2011:4), and that these ‘practices of citation, allusion, aspiration, comparison, and competition.... [stir] urban aspirations and sentiments of inter-city rivalry as well as standing as a legitimation for particular enterprises at home’ (2011: 17). Contributors to the collection demonstrate the salience of these ‘worlding’ practices to multiple actors, including urban planners and bureaucrats, aspirational members of the middle class and poor, precariously-housed urban residents. The ability and desire to engage in such practices, Ong argues, form part of ‘the art of being global’ (2011: 13).

Ong and Roy’s foregrounding of inter-referencing practices describes a tendency I noticed for hostel girls, as well as others, to draw evaluative comparisons between cities and countries. My presence as a researcher from abroad, albeit Pakistani in heritage,

undoubtedly influenced this, since my knowledge of life elsewhere was solicited by people eager to assess my loyalties; I was often asked quite censoriously about my impressions of Pakistan and how it compared to *bahir*, outside. However, it also seemed to me that interest in inter-referencing and global comparisons was also related to a particular moment in history. As Maqsood (2017) notes, the post-9/11 global context has informed many Pakistanis' sense of living under an international stigma, and incursions by the West into neighbouring countries had deepened a sense of Islam and Muslims being subject to an international regime of suspicion and persecution. More specifically, in the particular moment of my fieldwork in 2019, many of the girls I knew in the hostel were ardent supporters of the then-Prime Minister Imran Khan and predicted a glowing future for Pakistan under the government of his party, the PTI (*Pakistani Tehreek –e – Insaf,* Pakistani Movement for Justice). Furthermore, I felt strongly that comparisons between Pakistan and other countries were not motivated solely by my presence, as if such assessments would not occur if not for the presence of an outsider. Rather, processes of inter-referencing and comparison were part of a developing 'reflexive self-knowledge of citizens, residents and migrants as they locate and see themselves through particular cities' (Ong 2011: 18). While Haines and Ghertner argue that residents in Dubai aspire towards the making of a global self rather than a community self (Haines & Ghertner 2011), my impression was that considerations of global positioning and hierarchy were bound up in a sense of what it meant to live in and belong to Pakistan.

Inter-referencing was far from comprehensive, centring on specific locations that were suggestive of global orderings and hierarchies. Cities in the Middle East were often cited as aspirational models, constructed as clean, organised, modern and conducive to a devout Islamic life. For example, Reem, who had lived in Saudi Arabia as a child, told me that

"Pakistan is very different to Saudia. I have lived there and there is more security. Girls have more security." Locations in the region glossed as the 'West' were evaluated differently to each other; hostel girls spoke quite positively about some countries, such as Germany and Canada, as countries that were 'open' and welcoming to Muslims, whereas Britain and the USA were dismissed as expensive, dirty, hostile to Muslims and unwelcoming to visitors. China also appeared as significant on some people's mental maps (McDuie-Ra 2012) when they talked about significant locations in the world in comparison with Pakistan or Lahore – the primacy of CPEC funding for infrastructural projects in Pakistan, including the Orange Line in Lahore, seemed to invite a grudging respect for Chinese technology and power. However, people still seemed to rank Pakistan as morally superior due to the dominance of Islam. In the early months of 2020, as stories of a new disease in Wuhan called coronavirus began to circulate, there was a comfortable complacency that such a disease could never take hold in Pakistan since "there they do not follow *halal* (permitted) custom. Here we keep hygiene and don't eat *haram* (non-permitted) food."

Within Pakistan itself, certain sites were also foregrounded as 'world-class'. Islamabad, for example, was often cited as an example of a 'clean', modern and beautiful city (Daechsel 2013). Another space that was discussed through an inter-referencing, worlding discourse was the Gilgit-Baltistan region in the north. Although I never visited this region, it was a topic of conversation brought up often by different hostel residents, some of whom had visited the region as part of school or university excursions. Gulnar warmly told me about her class trip, two years ago:

"Our country is so beautiful. Have you been to the northern territories? I went once for three days and those three days were my whole life! It was so beautiful, like a dream. We

went as a group from my class, we stayed three days. We hiked three thousand feet up a mountain and then down. You must go."

Tabassum had also been to Gilgit-Baltistan, and spoke of it proudly, as a resource from which wealth could be generated:

"We have such a beautiful country. Our Northern Areas are the most beautiful in the world. And Balochistan has also many resources, that have not been used. Imran Khan wants to use these resources and utilise tourism to make tourists come and spend money here."

It was striking that both Tabassum and Gulnar talked about this region in possessive terms, as 'our northern areas', corresponding with the sense of proprietorial pride that Nousheen Ali notes as frequently surfacing in Pakistanis' discussions of Gilgit-Baltistan (Ali 2019). The 'simultaneous sense of emotional attachment and proud ownership [that permits] them to claim Pakistan is "beautiful"' (Ali 2019: 1) frames Pakistan as a nation ably placed to delight external tourists, and as the champion in a global competition of beautiful countries. As Ali notes, however, the framing of Gilgit-Baltistan as the 'eco-body' of the nation elides the region's history and experiences of state oppression, 'effectively serving to depoliticize it by invisibilizing its specificities and social identities' (Ali 2019: 43). Here, I see a strong similarity to Spivak's portrayal of the 'worlding' practices carried out by East India Company and British imperial administrators in colonised India. Spivak describes how these administrators inserted themselves at the centre of their world, inscribing India as colonised, British territory and 'obliging the native to cathect the space of the Other on his home ground…. He is worlding, which is far from mere uninscribed earth, anew, by obliging them to domesticate the alien as Master' (Spivak 1999: 211). Spivak's description

recalls how inhabitants of Gilgit-Baltistan are written out of the picture as the region becomes reimagined as a pleasure-ground, dominated by middle-class Pakistani tourists as they 'world' their country and themselves.

"There are two Lahores, old Lahore and new Lahore': classed approaches to worlding the city

The way that different people engaged in inter-referencing worlding discourse seemed to be influenced by their class, identity and sense of their own stake in the city. In the first months of my fieldwork, I attended many citizens' assemblies and tree-planting rallies organised by upper-middle and elite urban activists. These individuals, mostly from longstanding urban backgrounds living in the most elite neighbourhoods of Lahore, employed a discourse of affective nostalgia (Maqsood 2017) and melancholic topophilia (Suvorova 2011) in discussing the city. They deprecated attempts to render the city more assimilable to world-class standards by erasing its past, criticising urban interventions such as the construction of signal-free traffic corridors or the planting of palm trees as deleterious to Lahore's architectural beauty and history. These discourses penetrated my consciousness so strongly that when Samayya asked me one evening, "Where in Lahore have you visited?" I immediately recalled a list of the sights confirmed by these urban activists as part of the *asli* (real) Lahore.

"I have been to the Babri Masjid and to the Shalimar Gardens," I began hesitantly, feeling embarrassed that my list was so limited.

Noticing my hesitation, Samayya helped me out. "Have you been to Emporium? Or to Packages?" Samayya was naming two large malls in Lahore, both less than ten years old and owned by large companies. "Or have you been to Bahria Town?" she went on. "You don't

know what Bahria Town is? - it is a housing society. It is very nice. There are models built there of the Eiffel Tower, and something from Egypt; there is a mosque. We can go there on Sunday if the weather is not bad."

Just as McDuie-Ra notes that northeastern migrants know of entirely different spaces across Delhi to other residents (McDuie-Ra 2012), Samayya's 'mental map' of Lahore – and that of other hostellites - differed significantly from those of the urban activists with whom I associated in the earlier stages of my fieldwork. Against the discourse exalting Lahore in terms of antiquity and heritage, hostel girls that I met were often dismissive of *purana* (old) Lahore and the ancient Walled City. "The restaurants are expensive there," Ambaa told me disdainfully, having visited there for a day, "and the food is strange." The respective age and modernity of different parts of Lahore was not expressed purely in terms of architecture or urban layout, but through the behaviour and lifestyle of its inhabitants (Mallick 2018). Indeed, the old city was often described using the same tropes of backwardness as the rural areas from which many hostel girls came, as Miss Nazia's explanation of the differences between 'old' and 'new' Lahore suggests:

> There are two Lahores, old Lahore and new Lahore. Old Lahore is the walled city, Harbanpura… new Lahore is here, we are close to Emporium, we can get there very easily. Old Lahore is very conservative. If they see a girl with a phone, they consider it a sin. There they don't allow their girls to wear tights, [or] jeans.

The symbolism of Lahore as an urban centre was, for hostellites, not located in its antiquity, but its size, speed and hypermodernity, and the possibilities it offered for education, jobs, leisure and self-making. Against the firm, moneyed hold that elite urban activists, secure in their longstanding urban identities and residences, had on the city, hostel girls from rural areas and without a secure kinship base in the city valued sites of consumption, modernity and convenience as places where they could achieve a conditional

belonging. Markers on the mental maps of my hostellite companions included the inter-city bus station from which they travelled to towns and villages all across Pakistan, the small parade of shops near the hostel where soup, *pani puri* and Kashmiri *chai* could be obtained in the evening, and malls that took an entire day to fully explore; they moved between these sites through a network of infrastructural technologies, including app-booked taxis and buses, city bus services and rickshaws hailed on the street.

Shopping malls were one of the primary sites about which worlding talk arose. I was asked many times if I had been to Packages or to Emporium, two of the largest malls in the city, and it felt as if my acknowledgement of the world-equal nature of these spaces was being sought. Huge, glossy spaces characterised by sleek consumption, security and hygiene (Chatterjee 2018), trips to malls were, I think, experienced as witnessing Pakistan's modernity, as 'a world-class experience in the world-class city' (Roy et al. 2011:326). When I went once with Tabassum to the mall, she commented several times on the sheer number of visitors. "There is a lot of *rush*," she complained as we queued, and inside, as we paused to look over the balcony at the shoppers below, she reflected: "A sea of people (*log ka samunder*)." As we walked around the mall, Tabassum commented jovially: "Now it seems to me that in Pakistan there are a lot of rich people!" Her repeated wonder at the number of people in the mall, and her extrapolation from this observation to the wider nation, seemed to me to suggest an implicit, approving judgment. Tabassum was pleased to see many people shopping in the air-conditioned mall and to reflect on what this meant about the changing population of Pakistan. The 'reflexive self-knowledge' (Ong 2011: 18) generated through the comparison of Lahore and Pakistan with other equivalents allowed Tabassum to see her country – and by extension, herself – in a particular way – as upwardly mobile, confident, increasingly affluent and expectant of success.

Worlding as urban experimentation and praxis

One evening when I was sitting in my room, Kulsoom came in to chat with me about my research project. When she had asked me what I was studying I had said vaguely it was about 'women's experiences in cities', and Kulsoom wanted to explain to me that hostel girls' experiences were quite distinctive:

> Ninety-five per cent of the girls who come from *backwards areas* are very *simple* and innocent. They don't know how to fight, and they get a lot of stress and tension because they come to Lahore and they feel like everyone is trying to cheat them, that they are under a lot of pressure, that people in Lahore are very *tez* (fast/cunning). Maybe five per cent of the girls also are *tez*, and learn to fight, but I was always told by my mother 'Never call anyone names' and so I found it very hard.

Kulsoom took a sip of water and carried on seamlessly. Despite those difficulties, she told me, coming to Lahore for her degree had been the fulfilment of a dream:

> I tried for so long to get admission to PU, I cried continuously at home trying to get permission. When I got admission I was so happy – I said to myself, I have come to *Lahore* (*Yaar, mai Lahore ayi hoon)*!

Kulsoom's narrative captures two points that I found interesting as I thought about practices of 'worlding' the self. The first was what Lahore seemed to symbolise as a point of arrival. Coming to Lahore was part of a narrative of personal transformation, turning from a small person into a big person (Frøystad 2006). The fact that it was Lahore that these girls had come to was not incidental, but an integral part of the narrative about the progress they were making at overcoming 'backwardness'. Recalling how arriving in Dubai itself is often experienced as a marker of status and of 'having "made it"' (Haines and Ghertner 2011: 172), the significance of residence in Lahore was the opportunity that it offered to reshape and reimagine the kind of self that one might become.

The second point that struck me from Kulsoom's narrative was the necessity for hostel girls to change their behaviour upon moving to the city. Many of the girls that I met recalled the shock of suddenly being immersed in the crowds, noise and density of the city, and how painful their first weeks had been. For many girls it was the first time they had ever been away from home or lived apart from their families, and Samayya remembered: "When I first came to Lahore, I cried and cried. I was scared on the roads, I found it really difficult to cross the roads. I thought, how can I manage without my family? I phoned my mother, and she told me, '*Beta,* if you want to achieve things in life then push forward. Everyone in our family, everyone in our village is watching you. They are asking, how is Samayya doing in Lahore?'"

Like other girls, Samayya did learn to 'push forward' by adapting her behaviour and developing new capacities to cope with living in the city. While Simone emphasises an element of conscious experimentation in urban life, as 'Residents from all walks of life "tried out" different ways of being and doing things in the city' (Simone, 2001: 21), Kathleen Stewart (2011) describes such adaptations in terms of a less deliberate 'atmospheric attunement', as individuals learn to inhabit a world by tuning in to the rhythms, patterns and flows of affect that surround them. Sneha Krishnan emphasises the compositional nature of this process, showing how processes of contingent assemblage enable hostel girls in Chennai to reworld the city 'as a site of pleasure and potential' (Krishnan 2019a:2). From this perspectice, worlding is not simply an intellectual recognition of one's place in the world. Rather, it involves the development of embodied attitudes and comportments which influence the inhabitation of space, in the process changing the self as well as one's surroundings.

In this section, I want to explore three distinct forms of urban experimentation and attunement that I observed among hostel girls living in Lahore: practices of spontaneous outings and leisurely consumption; a gendered and classed habitus of indifference in refusing the responsibility of male sexual attention; and a quiescent cosmopolitanism employed to deal with cultural and religious difference. These practices, I argue, enable 'the crafting of a particular type of self' (Haines and Ghertner 2011: 171) – one that is sophisticated, urbane and attuned to the world around it.

Worlding through praxis i: consumption and pleasure in the city

Tabassum and I were in our room one evening when Rukhsana from down the corridor knocked at our door. Her roommate Rabieh had a sudden urge to drink tea, would Tabassum and I like to come? We quickly wrapped ourselves in warm scarves and coats and Tabassum carefully applied blusher to our faces. When she wasn't looking, I wiped some off. Rabieh and Rukhsana met us on the stairs and we piled into a taxi that Rukhsana had ordered through her phone, arriving at a café in Johar Town with strip-lighting, a trendy menu and a young crowd of customers. We ordered tea, fries and pakore from the laminated menu and covertly discussed the people at the other tables: were that couple on a date, perhaps? The outing was brief, only just more than an hour, and seemed completely spontaneous. Rabieh had simply felt like drinking tea, and the apps she had on her phone and central location of our hostel had allowed her almost immediately to satisfy her desire.

Although 'freedom' is a loaded term when it comes to talking about Muslim women (Abu-Lughod 2013), there was general acknowledgment among hostel girls that in the hostel they experienced less surveillance than when they lived with kin. Girls were able to exert greater autonomy over their own movements, particularly in our privately-run hostel where

oversight over comings and goings appeared largely theoretical. During the hours that the external gate was unlocked, between seven o'clock in the morning and ten o'clock at night, girls entered and exited the hostel largely, it seemed, at will, albeit under the surveilling eye of the security camera in the yard and Rafiq by the window in the kitchen. It was not unusual for a group of girls to go out to buy snacks from the local shop, or to call a taxi for a trip to the mall – outings that were made possible by the proximity of a range of shops and public spaces, and the availability of app-booking taxis, buses and easy-to-hail rickshaws. Often, in the evenings, one or another of my hostel companions would stop by my room and invite me to accompany them out to buy tea, fruit or snacks from one of the roadside stalls. On one such evening, after she had bought her favourite snack of roasted peanuts from the stall, Tabassum sighed on our way back to the hostel:

"We can't roam around (*ghumna*) in my town like this. If you want to go shopping, there you have to go in the car. And you need to have someone with you. You can't just walk like we are doing."

"Do you like walking around like this?" I asked her.

"Of course! It feels good to be independent, to be able to roam at will (*Azad hona, apni marzi se ghumna, accha lagta*)."

I persisted: "If you could do like this at home, would you?"

Tabassum shrugged. "But we can't. But if I could, then of course."

As Lila Abu-Lughod notes, Muslim women are often construed as being in need of saving (Abu-Lughod 2013). Within these tropes of rescuing, themes of enclosure and needing to be freed from patriarchal control often resound, so that Muslim women are pictured as trapped by patriarchal surveillance, expanding on imperialist tropes of white men

saving brown women from brown men (Spivak 1988). While Tabassum enjoyed the independence over her own mobility that she could access in the city, the contrast she drew between Lahore and her hometown highlighted barriers that were infrastructural and logical, rather than interpersonal. Her family home was half an hour's drive from the nearest town, more than an hour's walk, and with only one car in her family of six people every trip needed to be planned around each person's requirements. Being in Lahore gave her the opportunity to experiment with different kinds of mobility, including the possibility of walking through the streets in the cool evening and stopping at will at whichever stall caught her eye.

The movement of hostel girls through the city recalls Walter Benjamin's figure of the flaneur, an idle figure moving at a leisurely pace through the arcades of nineteenth-century Paris (Benjamin & Tiedemann 1999). Benjamin describes how the flaneur is a solitary figure, strolling and viewing all around him with autonomy and detachment, able to revel in his uncomplicated access to the city. The model of the flaneur is by no means an exact equivalent, however, since, as Phadke et al. (2009) show, women's access to public space is often far more conditional, based on the perceived legitimacy of purpose in public. Shopping is one of the reasons Phadke et al. note as generally accepted for women accessing public space, and Doreen Massey (1994) notes that the development of shopping as a gendered leisure activity relates to the figure of the flaneuse, the woman accessing public space for pleasure. Corroborating these insights into gendered access to the city, I noted that hostel girls' outings seemed invariably to occur within a logic of consumption, corresponding with the shrinkage of spaces not premised on consumption. Spontaneous outings took place at will, driven by the desire for a hot, sweet or savoury taste that could be gratified with ease in the streets, cafes and malls in easy reach of the hostel. Their calibration and speed of

movement changed in different contexts; walking through the street or at outdoor markets, girls moved purposefully and deliberately, slowing down to examine items on a particular stall, and speeding up again to move to the next one. In malls, on the other hand, girls tended to move in a much more leisurely way, taking pleasure in the securitised and climate-controlled environment through which they could stroll for hours. Hostel girls talked about going to malls in order to 'window shop', carefully examining items without an intention to purchase and soaking up the controlled and ordered space of the mall where consumption appeared glamorous and inviting, if far beyond girls' individual budgets.

Although access to public space is framed a central demand of contemporary South Asian feminist movements, practices of flaneurship, as carried out by hostel girls, should not be read facilely as evidence of liberation or empowerment. The right to the city (Lefebvre 1968) that hostel girls were able to access through consumption was highly conditional. In exclusionary spaces like the malls in Lahore, girls' access was premised on their ability either to buy their way in, or at least to look as if they could. Even in spaces that were theoretically more public, such as streets or public markets, girls signalled their legitimacy of purpose through task-oriented occupation, moving through the city with 'taut, vigorous purposeful' bodies (Phadke, Ranade and Khan 2009: 186) calibrated (Sharma 2014) for action, rather than lingering or loitering. Even when eating at street food stalls, hostellites did not linger at tables or eke out a portion of fries while people-watching; they ate swiftly and composedly before collecting their things together and leaving at a brisk pace. On one particularly hot day in the hostel, when a supply fault had removed electricity and water, I gathered together a group of friends – Malalai, Samayya, Zakiya and Tabassum - and went to a local ice-cream shop where I anticipated whiling away at least an hour, eating and

talking in air-conditioned comfort. Within less than fifteen minutes, however, the others had finished their orders and were ready to leave, and gloomily, I had to follow.

It is also necessary to note that the possibilities open to hostel girls for leisurely consumption and movement, however limited those were, were predicated on hierarchical and often exploitative organisations of labour, particularly of insecurely employed and poorly remunerated working-class men. The street stalls at which our appetites for sweet and savoury tastes were satisfied were run by men who stood for long hours, in bitter cold and in driving heat, by a congested roadside that filled the air with black dust and where the redevelopment of the city threatened their access to the limited space they had. The malls that we visited for pleasure were staffed by men and women whose working hours were long and insecure and whose jobs were often humiliating, involving body policing and rude treatment from customers (Bardalai 2021; Islam 2022; Mahalingam & Selvaraj 2022). More nebulously, the transportation infrastructure through which hostel girls were able to access the city with comparative ease depended on the continual availability of taxi drivers, whose status as subcontractors for multinational app-based transport companies threatened them with impoverishment through their very work (Akhil Kumar Devi 2021). It is here that I want to recall Sneha Krishnan's emphasis on the contingent assemblages that make worlding possible (Krishnan 2019a). The worlding that hostel girls were able to practise in experiencing the city as a site of pleasure and satiation depended on an assemblage of exploitative technological innovations, unjust labour arrangements, widespread privatisation and securitisation of public space and a cab-lagged (Sharma 2014) population of working-class men whose temporalities had to fit around the demands of their customers.

Worlding through praxis ii: gendered indifference with strangers

The city brought girls into contact with uncountable numbers of strangers each day, in their universities and workplaces as well as in buses, shopping centres, streets and roads. Chapter 3 discussed strategies used to deal with proximity to strangers within the space of the hostel; Chapter 4 noted how, as girls moved through the streets, malls, public and private places of the city, they used a different set of strategies to navigate proximity to strangers, moving within a 'bubble of private respectability' (Phadke, Khan and Ranade 2011: 179). Girls held their bodies erect and purposeful while moving briskly through space. Their facial expressions were unsmiling and attentive, and they looked through others rather than at them. They kept elbows close to their bodies and, when they sat on buses or rickshaws, they folded their legs under them and placed their bags firmly on their laps. They kept their limbs contained within an invisible boundaried area, not allowing encroachment. These strategies were regularised by structures of gender segregation and forms of mundane cooperation (Chowdhury 2021). In city buses markers divided men's sections from ladies' sections, while in private minibuses it was a common practice for men and women to sit in gender-segregated sections, on opposite sides of the aisle.

These strategies did not extinguish calamities of contact between strangers. It was not uncommon for girls to feel encroached upon by men, sometimes, it seemed, without thinking. One evening, when Zakiya and I were walking back to the hostel, a motorcycle with two young men on it sped past us, overtaking us so narrowly that we were splashed by a deep puddle. "Some people are so ignorant," grumbled Zakiya, shaking her feet one at a time to drain the puddle water from her shoes. At other times, the encroachment upon women's space appeared far more deliberate, motivated by sexual objectification and harassment. Many girls had been followed or harassed. Maha had slapped the face of a boy

in her university canteen when he had sexually propositioned her. Reem's colleague had threatened to spread rumours about her if she would not agree to be his girlfriend. Samayya had been followed up the street by a man on a motorbike calling lewdly out to her until she had fled into a shop, scared to return to her own hostel and reveal where she lived. Whether these experiences were recounted matter-of-factly or with a resigned indignation, there was never a sense of surprise or shock. Rather, retellings of these incidents focused on the behavioural response of the girl being pursued, whose response denoted her ability to cope and to repel strangers. The ability to manage the self and one's proximity to others appeared to be a necessary attribute of living successfully as a single woman in the city.

An attitude that came across very strongly in these retellings was one of an assertion of a classed superiority, and a contemptuous indifference to male inferiority. Girls combatted the perception of ubiquitous sexual threat through asserting a classed dynamic to counter a gendered dynamic. They criticised the staring and harassment they experienced as *jahil,* ignorant, and *badtameez,* ill-mannered. They refused its encroachment through planned ignoring, acting as if the aggressor didn't exist. After Tabassum and I left a restaurant together, she asked me indignantly: "Did you see the people in the restaurant staring? The waiters, the cleaners, they were staring so much. And one winked at me." She was discomfited and cross, the pleasure of the meal partially sapped by her awareness of their gaze. "I should have called him over and asked him, what problem do you have? But I am not going to do that. I do not like to make a fuss, create a fuss. That would cause a spectacle (*tamasha*). Such behaviour is ignorant (*jahil*)."

Tabassum advocated the ignorance of male intimidation most explicitly. One evening, I found Malalai fidgeting restlessly in their shared room while Tabassum grimly tried to

study. “I really want to eat ice cream,” Malalai fretted, “but Latif *bhai* is not going to the shop for me.”

“I can go with you to the shop if you want?” I offered.

Malalai looked evasive. “I am not feeling well, I can’t.”

Tabassum, sitting on her bed, smiled resignedly without looking up. “You mean you won’t.”

“There will be boys...” protested Malalai defensively, but Tabassum pushed back. “So what? Life your life (*ji lo)*! Why should you limit yourself? They should limit themselves!”

“They look,” faltered Malalai weakly.

“So what? Let them. They don’t do anything. You cannot restrict yourself because of them - you have to live your life. I go to college with many boys. I am the only girl in the ward sometimes. I feel comfortable.”

Tabassum’s experience of higher education alongside male peers was part of her attitude of ‘living your life’ – she felt she had earned the right to share space with men as an equal through her hard work and merit. Her relationship with Malalai, which was becoming increasingly strained as time went, might have also influenced her dismissal of Malalai’s shyness. However, Tabassum also expressed similar feelings at other times. One evening, she, Ambaa and I were out walking in the street when we approached a small neighbourhood park, fenced in with a border of trees shading the path. We turned to go in, but Ambaa drew back on seeing several men playing cricket together in the centre of the park.

"Oh, there are boys..." she was uncertain and unwilling to go in, and I, taking my cue from her hesitancy, also halted.

Tabassum collected us together. "Come! Why shouldn't we go in? We are doing nothing wrong." Confidently she strode through the entrance and we followed her, feeling the air cool instantly as we stepped under the trees. The sensation of the shade and the soothing dappled green of the trees was delightful after the hot and dusty street. We passed a notice on the fence stating 'No hostellites', and Tabassum snorted.

"What rubbish! We are doing nothing wrong. If hostellites are not allowed here, there should be a separate park for girls, or a separate portion, like in Model Town. We also want to walk and enjoy!"

We came to a bench where we sat together, and Ambaa bought a cup of chana aloo for each of us from a stall outside the park. Sitting together on the bench, we surveyed the cricket game and savoured the cool, savoury taste of the chana.

"We make our own place (*ham apni jagah xud banati hain*)," Tabassum said, reminding herself as well as Ambaa and me.

Tabassum's actions were pedagogic, as she instructed the girls around her, Ambaa, Malalai and me, about how to comport ourselves. Making one's own place, learning to disregard sexualised intimidation and asserting a sense of classed superiority all became ways to move through the city with a sense of individualised confidence and belonging. It needs to be acknowledged, however, that these forms of belonging were firmly posited on the abilities of girls and women to adapt and to successfully inhabit a set of gendered norms. In contrast, the agency of perpetrators of sexual violence, overwhelmingly men, was disregarded and treated as an unchangeable fact of life. The assertion of a classed

indifference to 'ignorant' or *jahil* men, who were framed as the perpetrators, disregarded the fact that many of the people threatening and harassing hostel girls were their peers, colleagues, mentors and professors, whose senior status inflected their ability to predate young women. Rather than identifying the agency and responsibility of the individuals causing harm, the emphasis that hostel girls put on their own embodied practices individualised responsibility for sexual harassment, and perpetuated ideas of good and bad victims.

Worlding through praxis iii: diversity and quiescent cosmopolitanism

City life brings together people of different languages, religions, castes and identities, and hostels, as communal accommodation for students and migrant workers, seemed particularly diverse. Although I never collected statistics, I met or was told of hostellites from Sindh, Balochistan, Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa as well as Gilgit-Baltistan and Azad Jammu and Kashmir. One of the only places where I heard explicit discussion of this diversity was in the *dars* classes that some hostellites attended. In these classes, our teacher, Sakeena Auntie, went out of her way to warn us of the importance of maintaining distance from hostellites of different backgrounds and characters:

> A lot of different girls live in hostels (*hostel men bahut ziyada girls rehti hain*). They come from different places, they have different customs and opinions. Hostel girls talk a lot and everyone has their own point of view, but it is better to keep silent and not talk or listen to others too much. You are living away from your families at this time, so this is why I am telling you this.

Sakeena grounded her warning in a specifically urban frame, focusing on both the number (*bahut ziyada*, too many/a lot) of strangers and the variety of places, customs and opinions that might be encountered in hostels as city dormitories. Her recommended

method of dealing with this diversity was to avoid discussion and fraternisation with the strange, and to focus on one's own conduct. For example, in mid-December, a girl called Qudsia who regularly attended the *dars* class asked Sakeena for advice on what to do when people wished her a 'happy Christmas'. Should she refuse to return the greeting? And would it be wrong to attend an end-of-term 'Christmas party'? Sakeena recommended that Qudsia attend to her own behaviour, without attempting to change that of others:

> We should not wish people 'happy Christmas' or go to parties for Christmas. If we do this, then we are taking part in the Christian faith and their faith is not what we believe. They believe that Jesus is God's son, that is not what we believe so we should not do it. Be silent and do not reproach those who are doing this, but if they ask why you do not join, you can say, 'My religion teaches me that this is wrong.'

Sakeena did not seem interested in distinguishing between appropriate ways of responding to invitations from Christians, who were celebrating Christmas as a religious occasion, or other Muslims who treated it as a holiday and festival, likely related in part to the increased commercialisation of Christmas on a global scale. Her advice focused entirely on how Qudsia should comport herself as an individual. Her recommendation to 'be silent, do not reproach those who are doing this' advocated a kind of boundaried silence that dealt with diversity through a quiescent cosmopolitanism, where differences of language, religion, ethnicity and culture were purposefully not discussed in order to avoid conflict while continuing to live and work together. Implicit within this attitude of quiescent cosmopolitanism was the awareness of interreligious and intercommunal persecution in Pakistan, and the potential for violence that discussions of identity differences could occasion. There was an adjuration towards reticence that seemed to be based on a 'don't ask, don't tell' principle. In a context where religious conversations were shadowed with the fear of an accusation of blasphemy, or where stigmatised identities carried implications for employment and safety, refraining from conversations about difference became a

meaningful way to avoid the risk of violence, whether to the self or to others. Thus, in the *dars* class preceding the occasion of Muharram, an especially meaningful occasion for Shi'a Muslims who are a persecuted religious minority in Pakistan, Sakeena warned us again to refrain from religious discussions with others:

> This week is Muharram. This is an event about which there is a lot of discussion. Remember that these events took place after the Qur'an was revealed to our Nabi and after he had passed, so it is a matter for historians. Don't talk about these things too much. Do not discuss the reasons, do not debate, do not argue or gossip about them. Remain quiet on these matters.

It was notable that, while the reticence that Sakeena Auntie advocated might lessen the likelihood of sectarian debate and conflict, she did not go so far as to condemn persecution or violence based on religious identity. The quiescent cosmopolitanism that she recommended required individuals to manage their own behaviour, but did not call for any social or structural transformation that could impact the experiences of minoritised peoples in Pakistan. It was also clear from the experiences of hostel residents from these minoritised backgrounds that reticence was not universally practised. Durnaz, for example, who was from Quetta in Balochistan, remembered being asked insulting questions in her hostel about her ethnicity and being mocked for her accent:

> When I was in the mess hall people would come to me and say, 'So where are you from?' 'I am from Balochistan.' And they would be like - they would ask me political questions, which would bother me. Like, 'tell me about Taliban.' And I would say: 'I know about Taliban as much as you know.' Like, why do I have to tell you about Taliban? … Also, the way, how the warden would treat [me]. She would talk the way I talk, because my Urdu accent is different from the way people speak. So she would - I know that it was light, but I would feel uncomfortable when she would talk to me in my Urdu accent. She was from Punjab.

Despite these experiences, however, Durnaz's response bore a striking similarity to that recommended by Sakeena to Qudsia; she concealed her upset and responded quietly, tamping down on the distress she felt rather than trying to effect a change of heart in her

questioners. Furthermore, an attitude of quiescent cosmopolitanism seemed to extend beyond the sphere of the *dars* classes into an orientation towards the world expressed by a number of hostellites. Samayya, for example, refused to ask people about their religious affiliation and expressed this as an ethical principle drawn from her own sense of religiosity: "I do not like these questions about 'Are you Hanafi, are you Maliki?' From my perspective, we are all Muslim, you are a Muslim - that is enough. We do not need to talk in this way."

It was also striking how little caste was discussed in the hostel. Veiled references acknowledging the importance of caste in social relations occasionally surfaced – for example, Zakiya relayed some gossip about an argument between the warden, Miss Nazia, and a hostel girl who had moved out abruptly. Zakiya had heard that Miss Nazia had called the girl a "stupid *pindoo* (village idiot)," and she felt that this insult was related to the girl's caste. However, Zakiya seemed very reluctant to go into details on this, and the impression that I received was that she felt it was inappropriate to talk about caste. She spoke disparagingly about a marriage possibility – a distant cousin - that her parents had presented, dismayed by his rural location and lack of education. For Zakiya, who had studied, worked and lived in Lahore for nine years, the prospect of marrying a man with whom she had nothing in common was distasteful; in her opinion, "*Mental compatibility* is the most important thing in marriage." However, she told me, "My parents believe in caste," consigning it to the preoccupation of an older generation. Zakiya's attitude to caste suggested that a lack of overt interest in caste identities became formulated as part of a modern, urbane orientation towards the other, compatible with quiescent cosmopolitanism and evidential of a sophisticated, non-parochial, 'worlded' self.

Worlding futures: ambitions towards the global

One night, Shofna, who lived in a room on the ground floor, was standing on the hostel roof and staring out over the parapet. As I came up the stairs onto the flat roof I saw only her profile, but I was impressed by the taut intensity of her facial expression and by the tension in her body as she faced out, her back turned to the hostel building. We greeted each other politely, but she continued to face away from me, gripping the parapet as she stared into the dark.

After I had been walking up and down the roof for some time, texting and stretching my legs, Shofna suddenly turned to address me. “Excuse me, you are studying abroad, aren’t you?... Do you know of any scholarship for me? I also want to study abroad.”

I came towards her. “You want to get a scholarship to study abroad?” I asked to make sure I had understood her correctly.

“Yes.” Shofna paused before confiding, “I would also like to do Ph.D.” Admitting this, she looked suddenly shy, proud and vulnerable. “Can you tell me of any scholarships I can get?”

“At this moment I cannot think of one,” I admitted. “I think that usually the university you apply to will have different scholarships available. Which universities are you thinking of applying to, and what is your subject?”

“I have studied biochemistry. I would like to go somewhere like Germany, Canada, the UK.”

“I will tell you if I hear of any,” I promised.

Shofna's was one of several such requests that I received during my eight months of fieldwork in Lahore. Many of the young people and students that I met during my fieldwork around the city expressed ambitions to live abroad, and I experienced a great deal of interest in my perceived identity as a foreign student as well as incomprehension as to my motivation for being in Pakistan. "Why did you not go to Germany to study?" Neelofar, who lived in Fahmida Hostel, asked me incredulously during the first weeks of my stay. "There is no *scope* here." But several of my hostelmates, as well as students that I met in other settings, also perceived me as a resource for information and guidance about applying to universities abroad. I was often asked about my experiences of life in the UK, and several times received concrete requests for help with job, university or scholarship applications to overseas institutions. Reem was definite that she did not want to marry: "Marriage only creates problems. I want to travel, to see the world."

While Appadurai emphasises the importance of cultural flows of information and mass media in engendering the sense of a wider 'imagined world' (Appadurai 1990:297), the ambition of young people in Pakistan to make a life for themselves overseas is also grounded in longstanding patterns of migration (Shaw 1988; Werbner 1990; Ameeriar 2017) and a lived awareness of global disparity. Many students with a desire to live abroad expressed a sense of confinement in the possibilities they envisaged for themselves within Pakistan. In particular, girls felt that corruption, entrenched social hierarchies and patriarchy would limit the career and educational opportunities available to them. "My teacher says there is no *scope* here," explained Maha, who was studying for a qualification in engineering, while, as Malalai grappled with an untenable living situation, she wished for a job "out of this country, outside, where people live independently (*jahan log* *independent* *rehte hain)*". Living abroad was imagined as a meritocratic utopia of possibility, where

women could live alone without social censure and where educational and career success was achievable based on hard work and inherent intelligence.

The lack of futurity that hostel girls envisaged for themselves in Pakistan demonstrates that ambitions towards worlding do not always stem from a sense of mastery of one's destiny. Simone argues that, for many people within the Global South, the experience of worlding is 'a state of being "cast out" into the world' (Simone 2001: 17) that draws on continued legacies of colonialism, imperialism and global inequity. Thus, Liechty notes the self-peripheralisation of youth in Kathmandu who understand their local environment as 'an implicitly devalued and diminished "out here" place' (Liechty 2003:237), while Ferguson (1999) describes a mood of abjection in Zambia that is occasioned by a sense of being cut off from the world system. Thus, practices of global inter-referencing and comparison are not always self-congratulatory; they can also incite a sense of the lack of possibility in one's present surroundings.

Although Liechty notes that cultural deterritorialisation can result in a greater sense of territorial stuckness, I would argue that the reverse is also true; a sense of the inadequacy of one's surroundings can impel an affective attachment to the imagined possibility of life elsewhere. Weiss notes that the sense of global peripheralisation and marginality in Tanzania impels an imaginative relationship to the global (Weiss 2002); Simone also argues that among urban Africans, 'a certain "worlding" has been enforced in terms of where they see themselves operating.... When children across most African cities are asked about what they will do with their lives, the answer usually entails a life trajectory carried out far away from the place they consider "home"' (Simone 2001: 17–18). Education is often foregrounded as a route to a successful life abroad; in Kerala, Lukose shows how education becomes imagined as a route to 'transcendence and respect on a world stage' (Lukose

2009:192), and in my fieldsite, education was envisaged as an assurance of future success and happiness. For example, Sara, who lived in a neighbouring hostel and whom I met through the hostellite *dars* class, had completed an undergraduate degree in Engineering with the best marks in her year. Now she was working for a firm in Lahore, but she longed to study abroad for a PhD and asked me to help her with writing a personal statement. Sara's passion was for electrical engineering, and she enthusiastically described how she would use her studies to create more efficient products that could improve life for people in her village of origin. Further study abroad would also, she hoped, enable her to gain recognition for her own designs and intelligence, rather than feeling frustrated and suffocated in her workplace.

In *The Promise of Happiness* (2010), Sara Ahmed describes how education is portrayed as a means of social mobility, self-actualization and empowerment. Ahmed notes that, in Meera Syal's book *Anita and Me* and Gurvinder Chadha's film *Bend it like Beckham,* '"getting into school" signifies the promise of new forms of mobility and freedom' (Ahmed 2010:154) and that the nation-state is presented as a beneficent actor that is able to save children from the melancholy of their parents:

> The nation must intervene to protect the second generation from the first, those who have failed to let go of their past attachments and who hence can only suffer and transmit their suffering, which easily gets turned into terror and rage. The nation becomes the good family who can give the children the freedom to be happy in their own way.
>
> (Ahmed 2010: 148)

While Ahmed's focus is upon the willing enfolding of British Asian youths – notably, girls – into a benignly parental British nation, the promise of happiness extended by the offer of university places operated in a similar way for girls living in Pakistan. Girls worlded the future with aspirations of a successful career and self abroad, and the offer of a

university place was experienced as an independent confirmation of worth and inherent merit. Imaginations of the world beyond one's direct experience and imaginations of the self came together – the possibility of a future marked out by academic success abroad offered an experience of the self as one that was distinguishable by merit, and who could be picked out by strangers as worthy of recognition and award.

Having received so much from the other hostel girls, I always agreed when one asked for my help with proof-reading an application or writing a request for funding assistance. It felt like the least I could do in terms of reparation for my own educational privilege, and as a mark of gratitude for their companionship and support. A number of the people who asked for help had already received offers of places in foreign universities, and were jubilant as a result. Just as Kulsoom had marvelled, "*Yaar, mai Lahore ayi hoon*!" acceptance into a programme overseas was experienced as a kind of chosen merit, an acknowledgment of one's inherent worth. What became clear though, as applications, submissions and notification of acceptances progressed throughout the year, was that there was a marked disparity between the number of hostellites that received offers of a place in a foreign university, and the number of these offers that were accompanied by sufficient funding to make acceptance possible. None of the girls that I knew living in hostels, who were mainly from lower middle-class, rural family backgrounds, were able to fund their studies without scholarships, which seemed non-existent; a single year in a British university would cost tens of thousands of pounds, lakhs of rupees. Girls assumed that the institutions that had behaved so beneficently in recognising their merit and deservingness would follow through with the practical assistance to make success achievable; instead, the institutions treated education as a privatised and high-cost resource rather than a public good. Sara, for example, phoned me delightedly one day to let me know that she had received an

unconditional offer for a place on a Master's course at a red-brick British university. It was her first choice and, she hoped, would lead to an offer of a PhD studentship if she excelled at the Master's level. When I saw her at the *dars* class a few days later, however, she was quiet and downcast. She was confused about whether the place she had been offered was accompanied by funding, and asked me to read the email offer for her to check. Reluctantly, I had to confirm that there was no offer of funding other than information about applying for loans as an international student. Sara went away from the class looking worried and, although I saw her at the *dars* class several times after that, she never mentioned the offer again.

A bitter pattern emerged over the time that I was helping girls with their submissions and following the progress of their applications. First, there would be jubilance and celebration at the receipt of a letter of acceptance, as girls revelled in the recognition of their deservingness and the possibilities that suddenly opened up before them. Gradually, confusion would dawn as they examined the offer of a place and realised that there was a marked silence about any financial assistance accompanying the offer. They would begin to research scholarship possibilities, at first with optimism and then with increasing desperation. Eventually, there would come a heartbroken defeat as girls conceded that the cost of study, lakhs upon lakhs of rupees, was unachievable; some determinedly continued to seek out funding, starting appeals on social media. The lack of actual support to achieve their goals left the ideology intact, and left women feeling like failures. Girls experienced this impossibility in terms of an individualised failure to amass the requisite paperwork, documents and funds, but the sheer number of people collectively suffering through this system created an alternative picture of privatised global education providers that treated ambitious and hopeful young people as a source of income, within a framework of

institutionally racist national border regimes. Individually, each of these experiences was emotionally exhausting, inciting emotional highs and lows that were draining to the girls going through them. Collectively, they made a pattern where the promise of future happiness (Ahmed 2010) was held out temptingly in front of ambitious, hopeful people, and made contingent upon their willingness to jump through hoops that were, in practice, impossible to achieve.

The precarity of the futures facing girls with global ambitions demonstrates the danger of regarding worlding in too triumphalist a way. This is in stark contrast to the way that others experience their position in the world as central and supreme, like the East India Company and British imperial administrators in colonised India who are, Spivak argues, 'engaged in consolidating the Self of Europe…. [and] worlding…, by obliging [colonised peoples] to domesticate the alien as Master' (Spivak 1999: 211). Although Spivak and Simone (2001) are describing contrasting positions, the commonality between their use of worlding is their similar awareness of subjective placement in a global hierarchy - either at the apex, confident in one's mastery of the world around them, as Spivak shows, or the sense of being 'cast out' with a future that is hard to envision and will happen elsewhere, as Simone describes.

To conclude, I want to consider the possibilities that worlding as a theoretical framework offers. Worlding gives us a way to explore indigenous forms of comparison and inter-referencing, and it helps us to identify ways in which individuals work upon themselves in order to groom themselves into particular types of urbane, worldly and sophisticated people. It is necessary, however, to recognise the very different and inequitable levels that different people are able to 'world' from in order to avoid a triumphalist erasure of structural hierarchy and global inequity. Of the young women that I knew in the hostel, I

do not know of a single one who was able to access the funding required to actualise their ambitions to study abroad. Even those who achieved their goal were not presented with an easy road to success. Ameeriar (2017) shows how Pakistani women migrants in Canada found their qualifications devalued and were absorbed into low-paid, low-status jobs very different to what they had anticipated; when I had returned to the UK, I met Pakistani students who were fighting against the hostile environment and Kafkaesque bureaucracy about the amount of income they could earn as students, while also struggling to secure a job for after their student visas expired. In such a brutalising system, attempts to 'world' the self could only go so far.

Chapter 7: ‘This is not our home’: *bardasht, sabr* and learning to endure

One evening, as I was writing up my fieldnotes in my room, Malalai knocked on my door in a state of agitation. She had been standing on the roof, she told me, when over the parapet she had seen Miss Nazia going into her empty room on the floor below. Miss Nazia had remained in there for some minutes. What had she been doing in there? Was she looking through Malalai’s things?

“Why don’t you ask her why she went into your room?” I asked, a little impatiently. I felt sympathetic to Malalai’s sense of violation, but I also felt that her complaining about it to me was unproductive.

Malalai shrugged resignedly. “How can I do that? This is not our home, it is hers. We have to be used to it, to come and go. She can tell me what she likes – she can tell me that I have to pay a full month even when I’m only going to stay two weeks, no more. Even if I ask her she says, beta, these are the rules. Allah, please give protection (*Allah khifazat farmaiae*).”

* * *

This chapter reprises the theme of ‘home’ taken up in Chapter 2, which detailed how discourses of homeliness were operationalised by hostel wardens while being quietly disputed by hostel residents. In this chapter, I expand on the ways in which the hostel was considered as ‘not our home’ by the girls living there. Women’s lives in hostels often incur fascination from outside, invoking tropes of secluded women’s spaces where all kinds of unobserved and unlicenced behaviours might be happening. When I mentioned that I was

living in a women's hostel, some people would express intrigue or even concern, but several older women spontaneously reminisced about the fun they had had during their youth living in their college hostels. Fazila Ma'am, for example, was an older woman whom I met through my fieldwork among urban planners and environmentalists in Lahore, and she reminisced fondly about her youth living in a hostel at the University of Punjab. Her memories centred around her many friendships and the pleasures of eating, drinking, chatting and spending time together in a safe and semi-supervised environment, chiming with the importance given to friendships in other accounts of contemporary hostel life (Singh 2022; see also Lukose 2009).

I was always surprised by accounts like Fazila Ma'am's, because they contrasted so strongly to the gruelling and depressing nature of the hostel life that I encountered during my fieldwork. For the girls that I knew, hostel life was marked by experiences of hierarchical injustice, financial exploitation and what I term 'petty tyranny' - experiences of circumscribed autonomy and access that ground girls down and left them feeling humiliated, exploited and enraged. In this chapter I recount these 'humdrum horror stories' to describe the affective wounds caused by humiliation and ill-treatment as a consumer. Against the presumed centrality of *izzat*, variously translated as honour, dignity, status and respect, in Pakistani culture, I argue that much of hostel life required girls to reconceptualise what dignity and honour meant, and to make calculations about what they could endure in a place that was not their home.

My focus in this chapter on hostel girls' visceral experiences of injustice, degradation and humiliation recalls the 'dark anthropology' identified by Sherry Ortner as 'anthropology that emphasises the harsh and brutal dimensions of human experience, and the structural and historical conditions that produce them' (2016:49). Concurring with Ortner's focus on the

bruising effects of neoliberalism as ‘a new and more brutal form of capitalism’ (2016: 48), I relate much of the suffering experienced by girls to their position as precarious tenants in a rentier-capitalist environment, and the gendered and classed expectations placed upon them. In describing conditions of suffering and discomfort, however, I want to avoid a devolution of ethnography into a ‘voyeuristic quasi-pornography' of suffering (Kelly 2013:213), and the falsely universalising trope of what Robbins calls ‘suffering slot anthropology’, focusing on ‘the figure of humanity united in its shared vulnerability to suffering’ (Robbins 2013:450). Arguing that the ‘suffering subject’ has replaced the ‘savage’ as the other in anthropology, Robbins notes that ‘the subject living in pain, in poverty, or under conditions of violence or oppression now very often stands at the centre of anthropological work’ (2013: 448). This, he argues, has particular implications for anthropology in that it creates a presumed universality of suffering and a standardisation of understandings of good and evil, with the implication that the mission of anthropology should be to focus on what humans share, rather than on cultural differences in meaning (2013: 455–456).

In this chapter, I resist a universalising depiction of suffering by showing how hostel girls experience their trials within the hostel and learn to cope in debilitating conditions through culturally meaningful emotional dispositions. These included *bardasht* (forbearance), *sabr* (patience) and regarding hostel life as an *azmaish* (test). Against Valentine’s argument that some suffering appears as a ‘counterpoint to culture... [that is] culturally unrecoverable’ - meaning that it cannot be explained through culture and anthropologists should not try (Daniel 1996:202–3)– I argue that these attitudes are meaningfully linked by hostel girls to the expectations of a classed and gendered life course. I argue that hostel life is understood not as a discrete and self-contained sphere, but as part of a wider environment of gendered and familial hierarchy and inequality. I also seek to

resist Kelly's critique of an exclusive and voyeuristic fixation on suffering by showing how practices of friendship and caring between girls made hostel life endurable and even enjoyable. My attention to friendship is not presented as a rejoinder to dark anthropology through simplistically focusing on the good life. Instead, I want to follow Ortner in arguing for an integration of dark anthropology with an anthropology of the good, rather than opposing them (2016: 60).

In understanding how friendship and the experience of hostel living work together, I want to draw particular attention to their contrasting regimes of temporality. In this thesis I have argued that much of hostel life is future-oriented, as girls prepare themselves for futures that may or may not lie ahead. In contrast, practices of friendship were lived in the immediate term, based on proximity and commonality of experience and with the recognition that many of these attachments would not extend into a hazy future. Their fleetingness, however, does not mean that they were considered unimportant. Like the sensation of *mazaa*, a quality of sensuous enjoyment predicated on the moment (Anjaria & Anjaria 2020), practices of friendship and care were valuable for their existence in the immediate term and were not devalued by the fact they would likely be finite in duration.

Humdrum horror stories

While Chapter 2 recounted the phenomenon of hostel horror stories, a discourse focused on the calamities and dangers of hostel life, not all experiences of hostels were so sensationalist. During my fieldwork I continually encountered people whose stories reflected a state of crisis ordinariness (Berlant 2011: 10), where hostel life was a series of debilitating petty assaults rather than a singular moment of trauma-inducing disaster. These stories often came up spontaneously when I began talking to people – if I mentioned I was living in a

hostel, people would frequently relate their own experiences, and their recitations intensified the sense of crisis ordinariness in these narratives. The ease with which these experiences were recalled and recited indicated both the emotional intensity of their endurance, vividly and resentfully remembered, and their unremarkability, as if nothing out of the ordinary was being described. The outrage that I responded with, both to signal sympathy as well as being a genuine reaction to stories that I often found shocking to hear, was accepted but not mirrored by my interlocutors. It seemed that, to them, the degrading and humiliating nature of hostel residence was only to be expected, such that, like the *pirzada* women of New Delhi studied by Jeffrey, 'complaints form a part of the taken-for-granted world' (Jeffery 1979:120).

Many of these humdrum horror stories focused on the poor living conditions of the hostels themselves. Residents described living with pest infestations, broken furniture, dirty surroundings and nauseating sanitation. The disgust with which uncleaned washrooms and dirty kitchens were described emphasised how sharing space within the hostel was experienced as a visceral threat to bodily integrity (Zulfiqar 2018; Butt 2020), as well as indicating the lack of autonomy that residents had over their own surroundings. Several accounts of poor living conditions explicitly referenced the lack of responsibility demonstrated by the hostel warden. Naveeda, who had lived in two private hostels, had moved from her first hostel because the food had made her so ill that she was hospitalised. Despite this, she was disbelieved by the hostel warden: "I had complained to the hostel warden many times; she said, 'everyone else is fine, you are the only one complaining.'" The lack of accountability appeared in institutionally-based hostels as well as privately-run ones, as a student from a Government College hostel complained:

> There is a water crisis at Government College. There are three water coolers in the boys' hostel there but only one works. Seventy per cent of students have typhoid or hepatitis; last year 200 students got Hep C. The University administration doesn't admit responsibility. They said, 'Students are using the washroom without washing their hands, or eating bad food in Anarkali, that's why they're getting sick.'

Living in insanitary conditions and contracting food poisoning, typhoid or hepatitis was physically debilitating, but the injury of these experiences was also affective. Hostel residents felt dehumanised by their squalid living conditions and the indignity of inhabiting foul-smelling, dirty rooms. Many of the humdrum horror stories that I collected were vivid memories of psychic wounding through humiliation and degrading treatment. Although some of these stories featured other hostel residents, the majority centred on abuses carried out by hostel authorities such as wardens or staff. Samayya, who had come to Lahore as a shy seventeen-year-old, vividly remembered the first warden with whom she had lived:

> I lived with a teacher, Ghusia ma'am, who was very *psychological*. *Mentally disturbed*. One night the power went out. I turned on the switch but it was off, so I went to sleep in the dark. Later when the power came on the light turned on again. And Ghusia woke me up and called me such horrible names. She said I was *pindu* (a derogatory term for a rural person), I was *jahil* (ignorant), I was *anparh* (uneducated). I lay awake half the night crying.

Durnaz, who had lived in a hostel at Kinnaird College, recalled an encounter with her hostel warden where she had been marched into a soiled communal washroom. "In my first semester she called all the girls of our hostel together – it was very humiliating, she called us all together in the evening and said, 'you girls don't know how to... take care of cleanliness'... she started talking about the washroom and said, 'you girls don't flush the washroom.' She could have said it generally, but she said, 'All you girls come and look at the washroom. Who has done it? I know who has done it.' I was not going in there and she called me and said, 'You also, you come and see this. This is how you girls use washrooms!'"

"Did she mean it to be humiliating?" I asked.

Durnaz nodded emphatically. "Yes. It was to degrade us. 'This is who you are.'"

Being 'eaten': financial exploitation and entrapment

Many of the accounts of humiliation in hostel settings focused on the sense of financial exploitation that residents encountered. In Chapter 2 I introduced the concept of 'hostel talk', the practice of comparative evaluation of different hostels' prices, facilities and environments, and argued that the rhetoric of consumer power that hostel talk involves is disingenuous in that it obscures the structural barriers and culture of fear involved in changing hostel. The effect of these barriers was that, despite an ostensible range of options for accommodation, many girls were unable to 'shift' and therefore felt trapped in their hostels. The high prices charged in many private hostels intensified their sense of entrapment. Girls spoke resentfully of feeling 'eaten' (*khaya gya*) by their wardens, who were *kanjoos* (mean), *chalaak* (cunning), and interested in withholding as much as they possibly could in order to maximise profit.

One evening, Miss Nazia's husband's cousin, an older lady whom we called 'Auntie', was covering the warden duties, and called the girls in the hostel to the table for biriyani. Although the biriyani was tasty, it was mainly rice with few pieces of the chicken that the hostel girls relished, and Tabassum conspicuously looked up and down the table before asking, "Isn't there any raita?"

"Yes, it's coming," answered Auntie tersely.

Maha brought a tupperware box to the table and handed it to the Auntie, saying, "Please put some food in this." When Auntie questioned her, Maha responded firmly, "I did not eat the midday meal *(do pahr ka khana*) and I paid for it. Please give it."

"In that case you should take the food from *do pahr* (midday)," grumbled the Auntie, but she went reluctantly into the kitchen and filled the box from the pot of biriyani.

When Maha received the box back, she opened it immediately to inspect the contents. With a disappointed smile she observed aloud to the other girls seated silently at the table, "She has not put any chicken in this." Maha did not ask directly for some chicken pieces to be added to the box; she simply noted their absence wryly before leaving the room.

Learning to bear it: *izzat*, *bardasht* and *sabr*

Experiences of squalid living conditions, insulting treatment and financial exploitation were framed as an assault on hostel girls' *izzat*. Frequently conceptualised as a central concern in the anthropology of Pakistan (Mandelbaum 1988; Papanek & Minault 1982; Walter 2021), *izzat*, translated variously as pride, honour, respect or status, is often considered to be a male concern about controlling the bodies, sexuality and comportment of women relatives (e.g. Ewing 2008; Shah 2016). The andocentric framing of *izzat* as a male concern with women's behaviour means that g*hairat*, 'the spirit that motivates people to protect their izzat' (Murphy 1996:106), is consequently portrayed as a maladapative and toxic fixation with sexuality, inciting patterns of male violence and aggression from which Muslim women need to be saved (Abu-Lughod 2013). Contrary to simplistic portrayals of *ghairat* as a predominantly male concern which manifests in gendered violence, however, anthropologists have shown that *izzat* is experienced in distinctly gendered ways. In her study of Paxtun women, for example, Grima (2004) points out that *paxto*, the code of honour, modesty and shame that lays out behavioural expectations for Paxtuns, has often been studied in terms of male duties of hospitality, the obligation to provide refuge and the expectation of *badal*, or revenge. However, she argues, historically little was known about

what *paxto* meant to women, since it was mostly studied from a male perspective. Grima seeks to redress this disparity by showing how values of *gham* (shame) and *sharm* (modesty) are central to Paxtun women's living *paxto* and their understanding of themselves as moral subjects. Grima shows that women do not simply embody male *izzat*, but independently live out and enact honour and status, often through specific forms of gendered behaviour and practice.

During my own fieldwork I found both *izzat* and *ghairat* emerging in ways that challenged simplistic and often Orientalist depictions of a violent male preoccupation with female relatives' behaviour. Firstly, the importance of *izzat* within non-kin business and transactional relationships, such as between hostel warden and hostel resident, shows that *izzat* is not solely limited to questions of kinship and patriarchal control of female sexuality. Second, anger and violence were not exclusively male responses in defence of *izzat;* as Laura Ring (2006) shows in her ethnography of Karachi, women also draw strategically on violence in given situations, and I also observed hostel girls behaving with anger when perceiving a slight to their *izzat*. For example, one evening Tabassum grew progressively more annoyed when the tea she had asked for did not arrive. More than an hour after she had ordered it, she confronted the Auntie and told her, "Arrange for the tea. We have got used to having it, without it our health gets bad."

The Auntie said, with a smirk, that there was no milk: "From tomorrow all the arrangements will be made, please have patience."

"So order the milk," Tabassum insisted. "We asked for tea a long time ago. Have it made. We have had to come downstairs to tell you again. I am not coming downstairs

again." In the middle of this the Auntie turned her back on us and walked off, talking on her phone. Tabassum shouted after her: "Have the tea made!"

This was, I think, the only time that I heard Tabassum raise her voice during all the months of our friendship. She was infuriated by the Auntie's rudeness in ignoring her, and when we went back upstairs, she was still seething: "That Auntie is so rude! We need to leave this hostel." Such a reaction, however, was unusual, which is perhaps why I recall it so vividly. In general, hostel girls refrained from overt displays of anger and instead sought to demonstrate moral superiority through calm and collected behaviour. When Miss Nazia insulted Zakiya when her rent was overdue, by telling her she was 'ruining the atmosphere of the hostel', Zakiya framed both her sense of injury, and her response thereto, in terms of *izzat:*

> If I didn't owe the money, I would go. Why would I stay somewhere to be spoken to in that way? Nazia[2] spoke to me like I was a servant. I didn't reply, that is not my upbringing (*tarbiyat)*. It is a question of my pride (*meri izzat ka sawal hai*).

Izzat was also understood as the maintenance of self-respect, pride and self-worth. Building on Grima's point about the gendered nature of honour, I argue that hostel girls lived *izzat* in a range of situationally appropriate ways reflecting their gender, class identity, urban location and residence in a hostel. Their aspirations towards middle-classness, white-collar professional status and success, and their place within insecure and sometimes exploitative rental relationships, conditioned their repertoire of responses when they experienced an insult to *izzat*. Thus, when *izzat* was insulted by petty tyrannies within the space of the

[2] Zakiya referred to Nazia without the usual 'Miss', 'Ma'am' or '*Baji*' that hostel girls would use to connote respect for the latter's senior age and status, expressing her wounded pride by withholding the usual recognition.

hostel, the recommended responses were *bardasht*, endurance, and *sabr*, patience. *Bardasht* and *sabr* are not considered antithetical to *izzat*, but rather manifestations thereof and routes thereto. Through *bardasht* and *sabr*, hostel girls gained self-respect and pride by presenting themselves as respectable and honourable.

Sabr and *bardasht* manifested in hostel life through putting up with petty indignities, insults and humiliations without complaint. Rather than challenging attempts at exploitation or injustice, girls found ways to minimise conflict, ensuring the ability to go on living together albeit in difficult conditions. In my months in the hostel, I heard often the exhortation to 'be patient' (*sabr karo*) from all around me, and often directed to me. In turn, I found myself adopting the same habit. On one bitterly cold day, while a group of us hostel girls were huddled in the dining room waiting for food, Tabassum was sitting at the table with a very resigned posture. She was leaning forward, with her arms wrapped around herself to keep warm, looking down at the table. I was walking around the room to try to warm myself up, and as I came past Tabassum I clapped her gently on the shoulder and said, "*Sabr karo*." Looking back, I do not know what prompted me to say this; it seemed just to be appropriate. It somehow seemed to me that the food not being ready on time was like the cold, something that just had to be borne.

Being able to exhibit *bardasht* and *sabr* was considered desirable for many reasons. *Bardasht* and *sabr* often have a religious resonance; the ability to endure and to demonstrate *sabr* is seen as a religiously enjoined virtue (Qureshi 2013). Within the space of the hostel, however, *bardasht* and *sabr* were considered essential in order to endure the iniquities and petty tyrannies that could not be otherwise challenged. As both the more spectacular horror stories detailed in Chapter 2 and the humdrum horror stories described in this chapter suggest, the respective balance of power between hostel wardens and hostel girls was

considered to be weighted very much in the former's favour, and overt resistance was seen not only as potentially dangerous, but ultimately pointless. For example, after Tabassum had finally raised her voice in exasperation to the Auntie, she still had to wait a further hour for her tea. When it arrived, it was terrible – cold, weak and tasting like dishwater. Given the control that the Auntie had over what Tabassum could command in terms of sustenance, Tabassum had simply lost her temper for no return and potentially alienated the Auntie. Drawing on *sabr* and *bardasht*, on the other hand, allowed girls to maintain their sense of dignity, as Zakiya had in her argument with Miss Nazia when she had demonstrated her superior upbringing (*tarbiyat*) by refusing to respond to taunts.

To manifest *bardasht* and *sabr*, hostel girls needed to learn how to 'adjust'. Adjustment – the English word inserted into Punjabi and Urdu – involved recalibrating one's behaviour and expectations in order to be able to live alongside others. It was conceptualised as an essential part both of hostel life and of adulthood. Adjustment involved being able to share space with others in ways that were harmonious, and involved the cultivation of a certain degree of independence and self-discipline (Asir Ajmal 2015; Khan et al. 2020) in order to be able to meet one's own needs. Being 'adjusted' in this way was a means of self-protection by avoiding the pain of rejection or refusal. Adjustment could also be a mark of maturity and a demonstration of consideration for others by refraining from making excessive demands on them, as Malalai was considered to do in her requests for companionship, advice and even help with dressing. As Samayya regretfully acknowledged, "[Malalai] is not *adjusted* to living in a hostel environment. You need to be able to look after yourself (*apne-aap ko sambhalna*)."

Both *bardasht* and *sabr* are conceptualised as highly gendered virtues, which it is desirable for women to cultivate (Qureshi 2013). These attributes are considered necessary

not only for enduring present life in the hostel, but in relation to an anticipated future life course marked by gendered familial responsibilities. In coming to the city before marriage, girls left the care and nurture of an idealised 'home' environment and entered relationships based on renting and labour. Living among strangers without kin attachments, girls anticipated being exposed to those who would want to profit from their existence and who, like the Auntie who reluctantly made tea or boxed up biriyani, would naturally attempt to maximise their own interests. After marriage, as middle-class women they would be responsible for maintaining a decent (*sharif*) lifestyle for their families without recourse to facilitating wealth; moreover, they would perhaps have to live with in-laws who would be as ready to benefit from their presence as the hostel warden. Not to be prepared for such a situation would be naïve, and it was necessary to learn how to live in such conditions.

'An *azmaish* (test)': hostel life as preparation for futurity

In *Space, Place and Gender* (1994), Doreen Massey argues that a sense of emplacement or being at home is always contextually specific, and that what counts as 'home' and who is allowed to be 'at home' cannot be assumed as self-evident (1994: 166–167). I find this point helpful in theorising Malalai's statement at the beginning of this chapter, that the hostel 'is not our home.' While bell hooks describes black women's construction of homeplace - 'places where all that truly mattered in life took place - the warmth and comfort of shelter, the feeding of our bodies, the nurturing of our souls' (hooks 2015:41) as fundamental to surviving racist domination, I argue that for hostel girls, being at 'home' was often experienced less as a refuge, than as a continuation of the expectations and pressures that they experienced in other areas of life. Hostel life was described as 'training', as an *azmaish* (test) or an *imtihaan* (examination), because despite all the petty humiliations that were

involved in living in a hostel, it was regarded as useful preparation for exigencies anticipated in the future.

When talking about the idea of 'home', hostel girls explicitly differentiated the natal home (*maika*) from their future home with a husband and in-laws (*susural*). Most girls in Fahmida Hostel were currently unmarried and the *susural* was therefore a theoretical construct, but the distinction between the two is still vital to observe since it significantly affects how 'home' is understood. Discussions of the *maika* bore the closest similarity to hooks' homeplace. Far from the dirty and polluted cities, in the clean and peaceful (s*aaf aur pur-sukoon*) countryside, girls' *maikas* were described wistfully as idealised places of calm and nurture, where the frenetic pace of life slowed down and daily life followed agricultural rather than capitalist rhythms. Girls spoke of the pure, healthy food they would eat, prepared for them with love, and the embodied forms of care that they would receive on their infrequent journeys home. Ambaa's mother cooked all her favourite foods whenever she went home; Zakiya's mother would spend hours oiling, combing and massaging her hair and Tabassum would always sleep in the same bed as her mother, embracing their rare physical proximity. Chiming with hooks' identification of the centrality of black women's labour in constructing 'homeplace' (2015: 42), the caring labour of mothers was central in hostel girls' experiences of a sense of homeliness, to the point that, when Gauria's mother was away at a family wedding, Gauria cancelled her long-anticipated visit home because it would not be enjoyable for her without her mother there.

However, even the *maika* was not always a place of recourse and nurture. One evening Hamida was discussing her thoughts of leaving the hostel, and going over her different options of staying in order to get her rental deposit back, or leaving earlier in order to forestall the unpleasant treatment she anticipated when Miss Nazia knew she was leaving.

Hamida was clearly worried, and I sympathetically recounted what Malalai had said to me just a few days before about the hostel not being 'our home.' I had been struck by her formulation as a way of theorising hostel girls' experiences and I wanted to test it out by sharing it with Hamida, besides which, I thought she might feel validated to know that other people were struggling with similar issues.

Hamida gave me a strange look that I could not interpret. She hesitated, and then smiled before speaking:

> Actually, I have been home very rarely for many years. When I was thirteen I went to live at my *naniyal* (maternal grandparents' house) so that I could go to school, and when I was nineteen I came here. My *naniyal*'s is a joint family arrangement. My two *maamuus* (maternal uncles) lived there and I slept with three cousins near my age. We had to be very organised there with our studies – we had to arrange how to share the light so that we could all sleep. And my family all love me very much, so my *nani* (maternal grandmother) would want me to sit with her always, even when I needed to study, and my aunts would tell me their problems. I would have to listen, I couldn't tell them 'Please, I don't want to hear this about my uncle.' So I had a lot of *tension* there too, sometimes.

I understood Hamida's response as a polite caution not to romanticise the idea of home as an idyllic refuge from strife. Her home for many years had been a place where the same requirements as in the hostel for organisation, sharing space and respect for the authority of older women had been necessary, and where she had been required to manage her own emotions as well as those of others. The care work that went into forming 'homeplace' was carried out *by* hostel girls, as well as *for* them, and this meant that time spent at home was not always experienced as rest. Rather, home could be a place of *bardasht*, *sabr* and 'adjustment' as much as the hostel was.

The emotive power of the *maika* in part reflects the perceived impossibility of permanency or security there. Although they wistfully recalled the clean air, green fields and pleasure in the family life of their childhoods, girls were also accepting of the fact that these experiences could not be projected indefinitely into the future. In order to achieve educationally and in their careers, it was necessary to leave home for the city; in order to fulfil the gendered expectations of their life course, it was inevitable that they would marry and live apart from their natal families, either in a joint-family arrangement with their *susural* (husband's family) or possibly in a nuclear arrangement with just their husband and children, where they in turn would be charged with the care work of making a home for others. Women might visit their *maika* once or twice a year after marriage, but their ability to take refuge and ease there was always understood to be time-limited.

David Zeitlyn draws on the work of Avery Gordon (2008) to argue that hauntings are often temporally multidirectional; one can be haunted by the future as well as the past (Zeitlyn 2020:500). In expectations for the future, marriage was anticipated as inevitable for hostel girls. Rather than the promise of a future sense of homeliness, however, marriage was imagined as entailing ceaseless productive and reproductive labour, with which women could anticipate little support. It was acknowledged that many promises would be made prior to marriage – Zubeida's aunt and uncle, for example, had promised that their son would 'allow' his wife to continue working. As Zeitlyn notes, however, such promises only have social force if their fulfilment can be trusted to happen (2020: 502), and most girls were doubtful about the likelihood of these promises being kept. Zubaida was cynical: "People say 'we will support' (*ham support karenge*), but then they do not. They say what you want to hear. You can't trust them." In the futures that haunted hostel girls, the only certainty that they anticipated was that the promises made before marriage would not be kept and that they

would be expected to be constantly at the service of their coresident in-laws. Thus, Zakiya related, “My sister says that hostel life is easier than married life. We can eat and sleep when we want, we don’t have to obey a *saas* (mother-in-law) or a *dewar* (younger brother-in-law) or a husband. My sister has three *dewars* and she gets no privacy and no rest.”

Among the dark possibilities of married life, the potential tyranny of the *saas* ran through much of the discourse of endurance and the need to cultivate *sabr* in the hostel. As older women with established relationships to men, mothers-in-law were imagined as a potentially malevolent force in married futures. Zakiya described the relationship with Miss Nazia, as a senior woman with authority in the hostel as preparation for this dynamic. After a frustrating encounter with Miss Nazia, Zakiya reflected:

“These things are lessons for us. This is a learning experience.”

“What are these lessons teaching us?” I asked, a bit cynically.

“*Sabr*. In life you will meet many critical situations. Pakistani girls have to endure a lot.” Zakiya laughed mischievously and slapped my hand in fellow-feeling. “If in the future you get a *saas* like Nazia, you will know how to behave!”

Some girls, like Samayya, were already practicing the qualities of *bardasht* and *sabr* in relation to their in-laws. Samayya was the only girl in Fahmida Hostel who was already married – although, like many of the other girls in the hostel, her engagement had been ‘fixed’ when she was seventeen, her *saas* had insisted that the marriage take place before Samayya came to Lahore to study. Her husband was now living abroad, but periodically Samayya made the long, ten-to-twelve-hour journey to her *susural.* After she had returned from one visit, I asked her, “How are your *susural*?”

Samayya had looked momentarily at a loss. Then she had shrugged:

"They are OK. I don't let small things (c*hoti moti cizen*) bother me. I let them go, I leave them to Allah. Otherwise they would torture you."

It was not till later that she went into more detail. She had gone to her *susural*'s to attend the wedding of her *nand*'s (sister-in-law's) daughter, and she was exhausted when she returned. Sitting on her bed, she told Tabassum and me:

> My *nand,* my *jethani* (husband's elder brother's wife) and my *saas* were all fighting amongst themselves when we were travelling back from the wedding. They didn't fight with me, but they didn't buy any food, and I had given my money to my saas so I couldn't buy anything. I just had to endure them fighting with each other. I couldn't say anything. Allah will judge such people.
>
> When I was at my *susural,* my *jeth* (brother-in-law) said 'Give her some work to do', and they all talked about me when they thought I was sleeping. I didn't say anything. All the dowry that I brought from my wedding is all being used by the *susural.* The washing machine, the AC unit, the plates, everything. Even my room is used for guests by my *jethani*. I didn't say anything.
>
> I had a lovely suit in the cupboard and my *nand* took it for her daughter to use. I didn't say anything, I just took all my other clothes and gave them to her. I won't fight about such things.

Samayya's emphasis, as she retold her visit, was on her refusal to react - she repeated a number of times that she 'hadn't said anything' in response to the disrespect she had felt. Rather than argue or defend herself, she had taken refuge in silence, and had given all her clothes to her *nand* rather than lower her dignity in arguing. Although Samayya did not use the words *bardasht* or *sabr* to describe her actions, her description of what happened, and the earnest tone in which she related the story, strongly suggested a conscious attitude of forbearance, patience and endurance.

Bardasht and *sabr* were conceptualised as essential characteristics even outside of marriage, in the hierarchical relationships of paid work. During Zubeida's year of training at her hospital, she moved between several wards in order to gain experience. When she came back to the hostel from her newest ward one evening, she looked at me comically when I asked how her day had gone:

"Yasmeen, I was at my *susural's*!"

I was shocked, but she went on to explain:

> My new ward is really difficult! We must take vitals of all the patients every few hours, which is a lot of work, and in addition to this we have to perform deliveries, assist in deliveries, admit patients... I was so tired. I was thinking: 'I work all day, I rest for two or three hours, and then I have to get up and work again. There is no rest for me.' And we [junior doctors] have to be perfect. We must work without sleep, without food. In fact, we house officers must work harder than our superiors. They order us to do a lot of work. I don't have time to eat, but I have to bring them food from the dining hall. I don't have time to drink tea, but I have to bring them tea!
>
> This is why I say I am at my *susural*'s. Because I have to stand all day without sitting, I must go without eating, I must keep smiling. I have to say, 'yes of course', whatever they ask me - I cannot say no. It's like a big *susural*!

Zubeida drew a powerful analogy between the work of a junior doctor and the work of a new wife - serving others, going without, and working long hours without complaint. In both roles, Zubeida highlighted the expectations of endurance, patience and forbearance, the attitudes inculcated by the process of 'adjustment' in the hostel. *Bardasht* and *sabr* were not solely of use in the hostel – they were also anticipated as necessary attributes for other areas of life, including but not limited to work, marriage and family life.

Given the anticipation of difficulties ahead, the statement that the hostel ‘is not our home’ seems less a statement of exceptionalism than an acknowledgement of a wider universal truth - that for rural-origin, middle-class young women aspiring towards careers in Pakistan, a sense of homewardness or progression towards an ultimate destination of security was far from certain. Girls might hope for success in their studies, for career security and even for happy and fulfilling marriages, as Samayya did. After her visit to her susural she reflected:

> When I go to my *susural* I get tears in my eyes. I don’t know why. When I go to my *maika* I am so happy, but when it is time to go to my *susural* my eyes fill with tears, and I want to turn the car around and go to my parents' house. My husband is applying or government jobs in Dubai. If he gets one, then he will get a family visa and I will go there. God grant that I can have my own house - a small one, but my own one!

Samayya’s hope for the future lay in living apart from the in-laws who made her life so difficult. However, this future was far from certain, dependent on her husband’s ability to get the right job, to be able to navigate discriminatory border regimes and above all, his willingness to live apart from his natal family. Samayya was diligently trying to prepare for a future where she might be living and working abroad, but this future, she knew, was uncertain and highly contingent on factors over which she had no control.

It is this uncertainty, I argue, that makes hostel residence an *azmaish,* a test. The futures that girls anticipate are hazy in the extreme. Marriage is expected but may not turn out well; the careers that girls have worked towards so tenaciously might fade into nothing. Hostel residence is a definite, yet highly liminal space, between a childhood past and a hazy and uncertain future, and the skills of cultivating *bardasht* and *sabr* are conceptualised as preparation for whatever the future might hold.

"Friends give their lives for each other": friendship, temporality and an anthropology of the good

In this chapter, I have described how hostel life is conceptualised as preparation for the future. However, I want to close by showing how the hostel was made bearable by activities and relationships in the present, through practices of friendship and mutual care between hostel girls. My ability to make this argument is equally as dependent on my own experiences of friendship while living in Fahmida Hostel as it is my ethnographic observations; through living in the hostel I learnt both to recognise practices of friendship occurring in the relationships around me, and to participate in friendship with others. Following Ortner's call to integrate dark anthropology with an anthropology of the good (2016: 60), I argue that friendship within the hostel should not be understood as occurring despite the petty humiliations, tyrannies and humdrum horror stories described above; rather, their imbrication is what makes friendship within the space of the hostel so vital.

Hostel girls used a variety of words to denote their relationships of friendship. In conversations with each other, they would casually and sometimes teasingly call each other *yaar*, connoting affection and informality; they would also use the word *dost* and the English equivalent *friend* when speaking both of and to friends. Sometimes kin terms were used between friends; Tabassum, for example, sometimes referred to me as her sister because we shared a room and said warmly: "I never had a sister, but now I feel like I have a sister because I live with you." Unlike the term 'tension', which Ring notes carries implications, in contrast to its Urdu counterparts, of a distinctively modern and gendered self (Ring 2006), I did not observe any significant differences between the way that *dost* and 'friend' were used. However, I never heard any girls in the hostel use the term *saheli* (a female friend of a woman) to describe any of their relationships, despite the fact that this term seemed the most grammatically accurate in the homosocial space of the hostel. I received the impression that

saheli was perhaps understood as rather old-fashioned and over-intimate, making the more agendered nature of 'friend' and *dost* preferable in their neutrality and modernity. What struck me as more meaningful than the range of descriptions for friendship, however, were the behaviours through which friendship was manifested. Contrasting with the distance and privacy that characterised many aspects of hostel life, friendships were embodied and intimate practices, often based on proximity and sharing. In a further contrast to the transactional nature of the hostel/hostellite relationship, friendships between hostel girls often manifested through acts of service, care and mutual support.

Throughout this thesis, I have consistently emphasised how hostel girls' lives are characterised by attitudes of caution, privacy, containment and mistrust. In doing so, however, I have drawn by way of illustration on the stories shared with me by a small group of girls who became my friends. Although this might seem like a contradiction, it illustrates how practices of personal boundary maintenance were generally enforced except in relation to a small number of intimate friends, usually in dyadic or triadic relationships that formed within shared rooms within the hostel. Within these groupings girls spent much of their time together, coming together to the table to eat, walking on the roof together and sharing extensive bodily proximity. Friends were often in casual and intimate bodily contact with each other; it was common for friends to hold hands as they walked or sat together, and Tabassum would often sit on the end of my bed, tucking her feet under the blankets to share warmth, and we would chat for long periods with our legs crossed over each other's. Once, when I passed Neelofar and Hena's open door in the middle of the hot summer months, I saw Hena sleeping on her back under the rotating ceiling fan, while Neelofar lay at right angles to Hena, legs crossed over the latter's, watching a video on her phone.

As well as bodily proximity, friendship was characterised by acts of service and care. Friends brought food and snacks for each other, massaged each other's heads with oil, shared clothing, make-up and jewellery and helped each other in times of need. This was an aspect of friendship within the hostel with which I experienced some discomfort. I felt guilty about accepting acts of generosity from other girls, both because I recognised the disparity in our relative incomes and because I worried about becoming tangled in expectations of reciprocity that I could not sustain. Refusing such gifts, however, often brought offence. Malalai told me reproachfully, after I had declined some sweets that she had brought back from the street, "Yasmeen, here in Pakistan, friends give their lives for each other." The longer I lived in the hostel, the more easily I began to recognise the extent to which these practices of care and service were central to wellbeing and even survival. In the absence of other relationships of care, and within the exploitative environment of the hostel where one felt 'eaten' by high rent charges and rapacious demands for profit, the care performed for one hostel girl by another could make a significant difference between wellbeing and decline. For example, when Hena had food poisoning, Neelofar bought custard powder and milk from the shop, delivered them to the kitchen and asked Rafiq to make up a custard that would be easy for Hena to eat. Similarly, Rabieh, who shared a room on the first floor with her friend Rukhsana, would often advocate for Rukhsana's dietary requirements. Rukhsana could not digest gluten, and Rabieh would come down to the kitchen ahead of Rukhsana's return to the hostel in order to instruct Rafiq to make Rukhsana's 'special roti', made from chickpea flour, so that it would be ready and still hot when Rukhsana came in. Four years before, after Samayya's former teacher Ghusia Ma'am had been so unkind to her, Zakiya had surreptitiously found them a room in another hostel and helped Samayya to pack up her things and move away while Ghusia Ma'am was out. This level of attention to a friend's

welfare and willingness to intervene actively was considered a key element of true friendship.

My position as a resident of Fahmida Hostel meant that I experienced this element of friendship personally, and some of the acts of care that I received made significant differences to my ability to sustain my own wellbeing. In early March 2020, Miss Nazia unexpectedly disappeared from the hostel and the record of hostel girls' rent payments, including my own, went missing at the same time. I was worried about being charged twice for my stay, but my friends both comforted me and promised support. "Yasmeen, do not worry, we are with you," Tabassum told me warmly, while Samayya declared bravely: "Do not be afraid. My father is in the army. I will call my brothers and my uncles!" A month or so later, when the Covid-19 pandemic forced a lockdown in both Pakistan and the UK, Zakiya negotiated with the warden to have my books, papers and clothes picked up by a friend and stored against my return. These interventions brought me the comfort of emotional support at a difficult time, and mean that I can still hold on to the possibility of re-gathering some of the records and data that I amassed over the period of my fieldwork.

I also experienced the inverse when Tabassum and I quarrelled. She had gone to Miss Nazia to complain that there was no hot water in our room, and she appealed to me to back her up: "Yasmeen, is there any hot water in our room, ever?" I felt I should be truthful and replied, "Sometimes there is hot water, but more often there is not." Tabassum looked as if I had slapped her, and I quickly realised my mistake when Miss Nazia seized this ambiguity to belittle Tabassum's complaint. When we left the warden's office, Tabassum marched off without waiting for me and for some days afterwards she refused to talk or even to look at me. Her pride had been hurt by the warden's contemptuous response; she felt she had sacrificed her standing on our behalf and that I had betrayed her. I felt remorseful, but even

more so, I felt shocked by the withdrawal of Tabassum's friendship and the loss of our formerly harmonious companionship. Although we eventually reconciled, those few days of coldness were alarming to experience, and made me realise forcefully how vital friendship was to wellbeing in the hostel.

The importance of friendship recalls Fazila Ma'am's warm recollections of her own hostel life, described at the beginning of this chapter. At the time that I heard these recollections, I dismissed them as rose-tinted reminiscences, finding it hard to reconcile her warm memories with the frequent complaints I was hearing in my own hostel as girls shared horror stories and constantly ruminated over the possibility of moving elsewhere. I hypothesised that her fond memories might be influenced by her class position; Fazila Ma'am was from an urban, upper-middle-class family background and had likely had far more social capital as a hostellite than the lower-middle-class, rural-origin girls with whom I lived. Over time, however, I revised my view of Fazila Ma'am's reminiscences as I recognised how centrally friendships figured in them. The parts of hostel life that the girls I knew recalled most wistfully were their friendships with others; Fazila Ma'am's fond memories of her own hostel life were therefore less contradictory than they first appeared, enduring as reminiscences of caring relationships and companionship.

The endurance of memories of a friendship, however, does not mean that the friendship itself necessarily endures. In contrast to Singh's hostel-based interlocutors, who stated that friendships were for life and that 'If I have to choose between my boyfriend and my friends, I will choose my friends' (2022: 483), girls living in Fahmida Hostel accepted that their close relationships and intimacies would likely not continue indefinitely into the future. The radical changes that they anticipated in the next years of their lives, as they embarked on stages of marriage, parenthood, and childrearing, would scatter them widely across Pakistan

and make keeping in touch difficult. However, I argue that friendships were important within hostel life, although they were acknowledged as time-limited. Anjaria and Anjaria note that play, fun and pleasure are often seen as frivolous, irrelevant or as symptomatic of something more important in the anthropology of South Asia (2020: 234). The imagined lack of scholarly import of these experiences seems to be related to their fleeting, ephemeral quality; a lack of time-depth or futurity is interpreted as a lack of consequence. Despite this, however, practices of friendship in Fahmida Hostel were important regardless of their imagined futurity. Girls understood that their life courses might separate them and that in a few years they might never see each other again, but this did not mean that the care, support and pleasure that they offered and received each other in the present moment was devalued. Rather, the friendships that they shared in the present moment were almost literally life-sustaining, and even if their existence could not be projected indefinitely into the future, their performance was what made that future possible.

Friendship in the hostel made life not only bearable, but sometimes beautiful. One October night, Zakiya called me from my room and told me that she wanted my help in arranging a birthday surprise for Samayya. She had bought balloons, candles and a cake, and we started decorating the smaller lounge with the balloons and a foil banner with the words 'Happy birthday' written across it. We fastened them onto the wall with tape Zakiya had brought back from her office.

"Here there is no security camera," Zakiya noted with a cheeky smile.

She went to get Tabassum to help drag in the coffee table from the larger lounge, and Zakiya carefully sprinkled rose petals into a heart shape before surrounding them with tea lights.

“Do you do this for Samayya every year on her birthday?” I asked Zakiya.

“I have done this since we first lived together. But this is the first time I’ve brought flowers and candles. I did this because Samayya said: ‘Oh how lovely it is to have flowers, candles, how lovely it would be’. She wasn’t hinting or saying, ‘Do this for me’, I was just listening and so I got to know.”

In the middle of the rose-petal heart and candles, Zakiya placed a chocolate cake with candles on top. She gave me her mobile phone. “Play a birthday song and light the candles. I am going to wake her at midnight and tell her ‘Yasmeen is ill, we need to take her to the hospital’.”

“She won’t mind?” I worried.

“No, no!” Zakiya laughed.

As I lit the candles, Tabassum loaded a video with the ‘Happy Birthday’ song and peeped out along the walkway. “They’re coming,” she whispered, and we got ready. Zakiya slipped in just before Samayya and darted into place. When Samayya appeared at the door, Tabassum pressed play and we launched into song.

Samayya’s hands were over her mouth. She had clearly been roused from sleep, and she looked overwhelmed. Her eyes shone in the candlelight and at first, she couldn’t speak. She hugged us all. “I love you so much,” she told us all, speaking in English to impress the fact upon us. “Thank you, thank you. I love you so much.”

We were all giddy with the excitement and delight of the surprise. Samayya marvelled at the rose petals and the candles, and cut slices of cake which she fed to us from her hand. “I am so happy,” Samayya told us tearfully. “Thank you - I love you all.”

Elements of Samayya's birthday surprise - the rose petals, the candles and the heart shape - read as overtly romantic, and I anticipate questions about whether the relationship between Samayya and Zakiya was more than a platonic friendship. Sexual and romantic love between women was not considered an impossibility - some hostels policed the placement of beds in multi-occupancy rooms to deny the possibility of girls sleeping in the same bed. But I think that speculating about the nature of the relationship that I witnessed between Zakiya and Samayya is unnecessarily narrow, and assumes that there are hierarchies of love with romantic and sexual love being supreme, and friendship being less demonstrative or meaningful. I do not want to impose these categories on friendships that follow different logics, where two young women essentially become each other's family and their most significant supports, and I think we can accept Samayya's declaration of love without a prurient interest in what that might suggest in terms of sexuality. Moreover, I also see Zakiya's willingness to involve me, still relatively new in the hostel, by asking for my help and giving me a job, and her willingness to share the glory for the surprise with Tabassum and me although she had done all the preparation, as a loving act.

The importance of friendship in the hostel challenges a focus on futurity as a marker of significance. While girls prepared themselves for a future that was indeterminate and ambivalent, practices of love, care and friendship facilitated pleasure and wellbeing in the present moment. The probability that such friendships would not extend indefinitely did not make them any less vital. Friendships in Fahmida Hostel were still important, even if their continuation could not be projected confidently into the future.

Chapter 8: On absence: methodological reflections on writing in and through incompleteness

In his contribution to *The Anthropology of Absence*, Lars Højer notes that 'speaking in the most general terms, anthropology has been obsessed with comprehending, understanding and accessing culturally constructed knowledge and alternative ways of knowing. These, it is assumed, exist and can be comprehended, understood and accessed by the culturally adept person as well as by the anthropologist' (Højer 2010:149). This comment makes two points: first, the assumption that there is such a thing as a fixed body of knowledge, existing externally to a would-be knower; second, that this knowledge is waiting passively to be discovered and that this can be achieved through sheer will. Both these assumptions go to the very roots of anthropology as a discipline originating in colonialism, where practices of cataloguing, enumerating and ranking became fundamental to arrangements of power (Asad 1973; Said 1978; Thomas 1994). The underlying premise is that absence of knowledge, in the form of uncertainty, incompleteness or ignorance, must be overcome.

In this chapter, I want to approach absence in a different way – not as a problem to be solved (Fowles & Heupel 2013:179), but as a topic worthy of interest in its own right. My interest in absence arose in the context of the global lockdown caused by the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, which halted my doctoral fieldwork overnight. As part of the 'publish or perish' generation in scholarship, my experience of the academy was mediated by the sense of profound precarity and the need for self-optimisation (Brunila & Valero 2018; Scharff 2018). The indefinite suspension of data collection, less than halfway through my planned period of fieldwork, felt at first like a killing blow to my ambitions towards an academic career. Looking through my field notes, all I could see were gaps in the data that I had

collected, which I experienced as foreclosures of my aspirations to write detailed ethnography and evidence of my shortcomings as a scholar.

Community care and peer support helped me gradually to reframe my sense of individualised failure. From April to October 2020, I co-organised online meetings every fortnight for members of my doctoral cohort, and participated in online writing groups with other social science researchers. In these spaces we discussed our respective experiences of fieldwork suspension, and empathised with each other's challenges around care responsibilities, illness, isolation and bereavement in the context of the pandemic. The commonality of our experiences helped each of us to reconceptualise our individualised sense of inadequacy. I began to think more critically about the mythopoeic narratives of fieldwork (Stocking 1983) and the heroic model of an anthropologist whose intrepid solo investigations result in authoritative pronouncements of fact. Such an ideal adopts as standard a 'care-free' researcher, who is typically imagined as white, able-bodied and male, disregarding not only the invisibilised labour carried out by family members and colleagues (Ahmed 2006), but the challenges experienced by researchers marginalised by gender, race, disability or caregiving responsibility. As Günel et al point out, such aspirational models of academic excellence are themselves predicated on strategic silences around '[f]amily obligations, precarity, [and] other hidden, stigmatized, or unspoken factors… [that] have made long-term, in-person fieldwork difficult, if not impossible, for many scholars' (Günel et al. 2020).

Thinking more critically about the expectations placed on researchers within the neoliberal academy allowed me to take a less catastrophizing attitude towards questions of incompleteness and absence. I began to take a more resistant stance to my formerly unquestioned assumption that the duty of an anthropologist is to seek knowledge at all costs.

Knowledge acquisition and dissemination is not a politically neutral act, and the inequities of the researcher-researched relationship, in the context of global histories of colonial rule and dispossession, make the control and possession of knowledge a vital matter for marginalised communities. Thus, Linda Tuhiwai Smith emphasises the 'protection of indigenous knowledge' as a key project for the survival of indigenous peoples (Smith 2012:159) and Audra Simpson utilises refusal in her writing to '[articulate] a mode of sovereign authority over the presentation of ethnographic data… for the express purpose of protecting the concerns of the community' (Simpson 2014:105). Absence of knowledge can, in this context, be seen as a generative act of refusal in the face of exploitative social relations (McGranahan 2016:322). Finally, Derrida's work on hauntology in *Spectres of Marx* shows the importance of absence by arguing that, even in the wake of capitalism's apparently definitive global victory and the so-called end of history, the 'spectre' of Marxism continues to make its presence felt: 'We all live in a world, some would say a culture, that still bears, at an incalculable depth, the mark of this inheritance, whether in a directly visible fashion or not' (Derrida 1994:15). These various approaches show that absence is not just a problem to be solved or a fringe scholarly interest. Rather, questions of absence, incompleteness and not-knowing emerge as central issues in academic research and practice.

In this chapter, I draw on my own ethnographic research in women's hostels in Lahore to propose four ways of engaging analytically with absence. I approach absence as elucidatory of four issues in my own work:

I) a diagnostic of power and resistance;

II) an indicator of negative space;

III) an un/conscious authorial disclosure;

IV) and an ethical choice within research practice.

These understandings deviate from a conventional view of absence as lack. Against the preoccupation with filling gaps in research, frequently proffered in research proposals as justification for topic selection, these ways of viewing absence draw on Sara Ahmed's idea of 'queer use' (Ahmed 2019), viewing gaps not as blank spaces or holes that need to be filled, but as windows, potential openings to the sight of something else, even if that 'something else' is not immediately obvious. In my writing, I consciously utilise a certain amount of 'authorial playfulness, the room for maneuver, innovation and creativity' (Lal 2013:39), seen by Ruby Lal as helpful in writing about women largely missing from historical archives. Lal's advocacy of playfulness as an authorial technique coheres with Saidiya Hartman's choice of critical fabulation 'to imagine what cannot be verified, a realm of experience which is situated between two zones of death' (Hartman 2008:12)) when reconstructing enslaved black women's lives. In working with histories of terrible violence and dehumanising erasure, critical fabulation offers Hartman a way of 'retrieving what remains dormant…without committing further violence in my own act of narration' (Hartman 2008: 2). The same awareness of the symbolic violence of representation motivates John Jackson's call for thin description, which he sees as 'a response to a certain kind of overconfidence in anthropology, an arrogance borne of the powers that "thick description"… is believed to grant adherents' (Jackson 2013:13). By drawing on these models of critical fabulation, playfulness and thin description, I hope to offer accounts that leave visible 'the cuts, seams and stitches - those cobbling marks' of historical reconstruction (Guha & Spivak 1988:47). My engagement with the work of feminist, postcolonial and antiracist scholars of colour also acknowledges a different concern with absence and presence - that occasioned by a scholarly politics of citation (Ahmed 2017),

which determines whose work deserves reference and whose contributions are elided from the canon.

Absence in the written record: approaching absence as a diagnostic of power

> … 'the gaps in our knowledge…are as revealing of working-class conditions as any direct reference to them.'
>
> (Chakrabarty, in Guha and Spivak 1988: 185)

When I started fieldwork in August 2019, I confidently expected to amass a significant body of data relating to gendered experiences of urban space. My hubris, however, dissipated as I encountered suspicion and resistance in responses to my efforts at data collection. Wardens of other hostels asked pointed questions about my affiliations when I attempted to visit their premises, and the women living in my own hostel barely interacted with each other. Despite the communal nature of our living arrangements, few residents became intimate or even friendly, and my forays at introduction were often met by confusion and a polite retreat. The atmosphere of reserve was exacerbated by how frequently residents moved in and out. At least twenty-five women moved in and out of the hostel over the time I was there, some staying just a few days, with typically unheralded appearances and departures. Often, a new woman would simply be sitting at the dining table when I came to eat, in the place of another who had left overnight and would not be seen again.

Although such experiences were frustrating at the time, these fleeting interactions told their own story. The frequency with which my requests were met with polite evasions and circumlocutions, rather than an outright refusal, demonstrated both the power that I was perceived to hold and the ability of people in my field site to resist my will to knowledge.

These covert forms of resistance (Guha & Spivak 1988; Scott 1985) were achieved so subtly that it was only months later, as I revisited my field notes, that I noticed how many times a warmly agreed-to visit or conversation was put off, rescheduled or conveniently forgotten. These silent refusals and subaltern tactics were only legible in my archive through the records of my own affective frustration, as I puzzled over my inability to follow up leads. At the time I experienced this as a powerlessness and lack of capacity, feeling like a child or an animal pawing ineffectually at a closed door, but in rereading my own records I realised the anxiety that must have been prompted my overtures and questions. The suspicion I encountered as a self-proclaimed researcher, who spoke Urdu with a British accent, illuminated wariness about governmental surveillance and international espionage in the context of a widespread awareness of Pakistan's stigmatised image abroad. Recognising this made me humbler about my own positionality in the field, as I acknowledged how the knowledge that I sought was communally constructed through relationships with interlocutors and the inequality that characterised my imagined researcher-subject relationship.

The silences and gaps in my data were also suggestive of wider social dynamics. Thinking through the theory of 'negative archaeology', the practice of looking for what is absent from a site as well as what is there (Fowles and Heupel 2013), it occurred to me that the reserve and distance between hostel residents indicated something significant about the urban hostel life for young women, and their own knowledge of the transience of this time in their lives. Residents would eventually move on, either returning to their homes or going to live with in-laws; while they might become emotionally close to a roommate, few would keep in touch or meet again. Tabassum, who had lived in hostels for four years while doing her medical degree, had seen many close friends come and go and was philosophical: "You

live together, you share everything, but then things change. This is how life is." I also started to reconsider what the frequency of women 'shifting' between hostels might suggest. Although I had initially seen it only as a hindrance to be overcome in my work, the frequency of movements between hostels pointed to women's desire to 'shop around', sampling the food, security, atmosphere and facilities of a hostel in a commercialised market of private accommodation, and discussing the respective merits of different options in constant 'hostel talk'. Over the time that I lived in the hostel I noticed these dynamics changing as Miss Nazia began demanding a 'security deposit' upon arrival. Although this would theoretically be repaid on receipt of a month's notice, the reality was far murkier. Hostel residents who had given notice were required to endure such unpleasant treatment from the hostel staff that many elected to leave before the month was out, whereupon the room would often be rented again the next day and Miss Nazia's monthly profit doubled. My initial interpretation of hostel residents' transience as frustrating my will to knowledge, therefore, overlooked the facts that women's increasing fixture in a specific location was not benign, and that their departures under circumstances of harassment were experienced as humiliating experiences of exploitation and defeat.

Absence as negative space

Some of the gaps that I registered in my field notes related to the sudden and unannounced departures of particular people whom I never saw or spoke to again. These disappearances, lacking explanatory details and too unique to be assimilated into an analytical trend, nonetheless could be understood in terms of the voids that they made apparent. In her sociology of nothingness, Scott argues that the absence of objects can leave

a void whose 'negative space is meaningful despite (or rather because of) its emptiness, as are the forms recognised to be missing from it' (Scott 2017:11). Scott's use of the idea of negative space draws on Brekhus, who shows how 'the void between structures is articulated as a positive shape with as much form as the structures themselves' (Brekhus 1998:43). Croissant's characterisation of vacuums as 'an absence in which things might be made present' illustrates the potential of a consideration of negative space:

> A black hole is not visible, although it is not absent, and its effects on light and nearby masses are measurable. Vacuums are an absence of matter in space, and while not an object of study in themselves, as an absence in which things might be made present vacuums highlight properties of those things: the properties of light in a vacuum, for example.
>
> (Croissant 2014:18)

There is a strongly material quality to the experience of negative space, where the sensation of what is missing seems to take form most powerfully in highly specific locations. Thus, the empty homes of migrants are experienced as affectively heavy in Albania (Pistrick & Bachmeier 2017) while Navaro-Yashin shows how the Cyprus landscape is charged with melancholia by its inhabitants' sense of missing people, objects and histories (Navaro-Yashin 2009). Butalia, on the other hand, describes how absences can render visible formerly overlooked relations of labour and inequality, disregarded until no longer present:

> In many places [after Partition] Dalits, performers of such essential services, invisible by virtue of their presence, now became visible by virtue of their absence. Where were they? Who would perform all the menial tasks that needed doing - the swabbing, the sweeping, the sanitary services? How would people live? Caste Hindus now began to 'see' Dalits.
>
> (Butalia 2000:249)

While a sense of what is missing can haunt locations (Gordon 2008), negative space also makes new kinds of social processes, activities and relationships visible. As Dzenovska shows in Latvia, the emptying out of rural towns and villages becomes 'a powerful lens for analyzing novel relations between capital, the state, people and place' (Dzenovska 2020:12) and Ansari and Gould show how new forms of citizenship and belonging were made feasible in the spaces and ruptures made by Partition (Ansari & Gould 2020). By approaching absence as a negative space, I began to think about what was made visible when particular people disappeared abruptly from my field site.

The disappearance of the cooks

One afternoon I returned to the hostel to find confusion in the dining room. Instead of the two male cooks, the tall and melancholy Rafiq and short, mischievous Latif, Miss Nazia was looking harassed as she heated up bowls of leftover *salan* (curried meat) in the dilapidated microwave. The other hostel residents were congregating around her, speaking excitedly.

Latif and Rafiq had disappeared overnight. They had been gone in the morning when the girls came for breakfast, and they were not answering calls to their phones. Samayya and Maha had tried to call them many times that morning but the numbers were always busy, or perhaps their phones were turned off. Neither had spoken to the warden, and she had no idea where they were.

"I don't know what can have happened," fretted Miss Nazia anxiously as she passed a bowl of *salan* to Nureen. "If they wanted a holiday, they should have told me. I would have made arrangements. But Rafiq is part of my family. I am worried, what has happened to

him? They have left without their salary, but all their belongings are gone." She nodded towards the windowless space under the stairs where Rafiq slept.

"If their things are gone, it means they have left," said Maha sagely.

"But why would they leave without their salary?" puzzled Miss Nazia. "They get paid 10 thousand rupees a month."

Hastily she finished dishing up the *salan*. "Please, compromise for one day, I will make other arrangements. I am very sorry for the inconvenience -" and she swiftly exited the dining room.

After Miss Nazia had left, the hostel girls continued speculating enthusiastically. The disappearance of Rafiq and Latif seemed to have broken an invisible barrier of reserve. As everyone shared their theories, I wondered aloud if some accident had befallen one of the cooks. However, the others were sure that they had left deliberately. "They have taken all their things," Nureen explained. "They have left secretly. They are not coming back."

"I think it was a sudden decision," opined Nimra. "They weren't planning it."

"Have you heard?" I asked Sehrish, who had just come in. She lifted her eyebrows cynically as she sipped at her water. "Of course," she said, "this is *breaking news*!"

"I want to have tea," Maha complained. She went into the kitchen and looked uncertainly at the gas stove, which looked broken and precarious. Rafiq had operated it with skill, cooking *salan* daily and making fresh *roti* over the flame for every meal, but the hostel residents' confinement to the dining room meant that we had rarely watched how Rafiq had lit the stove from the gas canister, or seen where he kept matches to ignite the flame.

Tentatively, Maha attempted to light the gas. Finally she gave up and took me with her to the local shop to buy ready-made tea from a street stall. I had rarely spoken with Maha before, but now we were united, as if a team. The holiday sense of normality being suspended continued as she, Samayya and I went up to the roof and gossiped. Again and again the conversation came back to the disappearance of the cooks. When we went down in the evening to get dinner, some *salan* and *roti* that the warden had had delivered, the conversation was still on the same topic.

"It's very bad," Maheen said severely. "They should not have left like this."

There were bitter complaints about the quality of food, rapidly going cold, and the tough *roti*. Miss Nazia had disappeared into her living quarters, perhaps not wanting to answer any more questions, so there was no one at whom to direct our unhappiness.

"I want to drink tea," grumbled Sehrish, who always had tea after dinner.

"We could make tea in the microwave," suggested Maha, but Maheen swiftly negated that: "Who is going to get teabags?" Although the neighbourhood shop was less than fifty steps away, the idea of crossing the threshold of the hostel seemed unthinkable to the other hostel residents - it was already dark on that cold January night. Normally, if someone wanted something from the shops, they would send Latif to collect it for them and would afterwards complain that he had kept too much of the change. In his absence, the journey to the shop seemed impossible.

There was a feeling of helplessness around the table. The excitement had dissipated and now the girls were facing a cold, hungry and uncomfortable night. They were deprived of the comfort that they were used to, and they had no certainty about what tomorrow would be

like. How long would this state of affairs, the late mealtimes, scanty meals and ill-made food, last? When would the warden find a new cook, and how?

The confusion was still present in the hostel the following day. No food was available for breakfast, and when I left my room in the morning I saw Attiya, the frail woman who came every day to clean the hostel, and her young daughter Aiman lugging items out from the cupboard under the stairs where Rafiq had slept. They dragged everything in the cupboard out into the cupboard, where the items lay forlornly in piles - some ragged items of clothing, a threadbare blanket and a few torn-out magazine pages. Periodically Miss Nazia emerged from her apartment, barked orders at them, and then disappeared again.

When she saw me, she greeted me lavishly. “Yasmeen, darling, how are you? Isn’t this a shocking thing? And do you know, my dog died last night. He was very sick, and I cried and cried. I think the cooks poisoned him. They fed him the wrong thing and then they got scared and ran away. They should not have done that. I would have accepted if it were an accident. But Rover was a very valuable dog. This is an awful thing. Just compromise for one day, I will rectify this situation.”

Tabassum came back to the hostel in the afternoon, exhausted from her overnight shift at the hospital and longing for a shower. Usually when she came back from an overnight shift, Rafiq would light the geyser so that she could shower in hot water. Now that Rafiq had gone the geyser was unlit. When Tabassum complained, Miss Nazia dismissed her: “I don’t know how to turn on the geyser. My husband will do it when he comes home this evening.”

Tabassum didn’t believe her. “She doesn’t want to turn it on or to show us how to turn it on, because then we could light it for ourselves and have hot water whenever we wanted.”

Tabassum went to the roof and looked at the geyser thoughtfully. She fetched matches and gingerly tried to light the gas. I hovered anxiously nearby, in mortal fear that she would blow herself up. Finally, Tabassum gave up. She sat and fumed in bitter discomfort, cold, dirty and tired. She wanted to call for a cup of tea, but who was there to make it for her?

"No one can live with this Nazia woman," Tabassum pronounced. "The truth is, they could not endure her. That is why they ran away. If they went without their pay, that shows there is a problem." Tabassum had clashed with Rafiq and Latif on several occasions, but now she seemed wistful. "They were very *sincere* with her, but she gave them so much disrespect, how could they endure it?"

The permanent nature of the cooks' disappearance was confirmed for the hostel residents by their belongings having also disappeared. As Maha concluded, "If their things have gone that means they have left." Their unanswered phones were also taken as corroboration for the finality of their departure. No longer would they take orders for tea or agree to fetch fifty rupees' worth of fries from the corner store. The calls that sounded fruitlessly, ringing without ever being answered, showed that they had decided against investing any more in these relationships: their relationship with this hostel was over.

What Rafiq and Latif left behind, as much as what they chose to carry with them, revealed something about the nature of their lives, a 'trace' (Meyer 2012:107) of their past habitations. Aiman and Attiya cleared out the cupboard under the stairs in the courtyard, a space that I had never before seen inside. Now I saw a narrow and windowless space without a fan, light or air cooler, with a thin mattress stretched on the floor, some peeling pictures attached to the wall, and a few bundles of rags at the foot of the mattress. This was the space in which Rafiq, an adult man who worked over eighteen hours a day, could stretch

his long body to rest. There was a second mattress for Latif propped against the wall, but no space to lay it out in the cupboard space; either they took it in turns, or Latif laid a mattress in the kitchen while Rafiq commandeered the cupboard space.

Although the reason for their departure was unknown, Rafiq and Latif's absence revealed invisibilised labours of care that we had taken for granted until they were no longer present. Without their daily labours, the hostel residents were hungry, ill-nourished and dissatisfied, and the warden's inability to provide adequate care was revealed. She ordered food 'from outside', from a stall in the street, and there were bitter complaints about the food being cold, poor quality and unappetising. The tough *roti* was indigestible for Rukhsana, who could not eat wheat. Rafiq had always known to make Rukhsana a gluten-free *roti* from *besan* (chickpea flour), but this knowledge had disappeared with him. Rabieh, Rukhsana's roommate, had to investigate the abandoned kitchen to find the unlabelled jar of *besan.* She gave it to ten-year-old Aiman, with the instructions to "Tell Miss Nazia to mix this with a little water, salt and one egg."

"And tell her that we all want tea," added Tabassum quickly.

Aiman's face fell. "Okay," she sighed, probably anticipating the warden's displeasure.

Although we lingered at the table after eating, no tea arrived that day, and Rukhsana's single *roti* only after a long interval. Hot water for showering, food for individual needs and freshly-made tea had all disappeared with Rafiq and Latif, and the burden on the labouring bodies of Aiman and Attiya had increased in proportion.

The various interpretations that surrounded the cooks' disappearance indicated different moral attitudes and perspectives. The hostellites interpreted their absence as indicative of a moral failing, a lack of responsibility and *sharif* (honourable) conduct, on the part of Rafiq

and Latif, and their disappearance without notice was taken as evidence of a lack of concern for their responsibilities. At the same time, however, an undertone of responsibility attached to the warden. Hostel girls read the cooks' disappearing without their salaries as highly significant - how bad must things have been, that they would leave without pay? Their unannounced departure became interpreted as evidence of their suffering under the warden. Had she been more tolerable, the hostellites reasoned, Rafiq and Latif would not have left. Miss Nazia, on the other hand, took the death of her dog as evidence of the cooks' dereliction of responsibility and her own lack of culpability for their departure. She wove an explanatory web between the dog's monetary worth, his death and the unexplained departure of the cooks to construct an explanation that absolved her from blame and rendered her a victim of the cooks' wrongdoing. Far from an interpretive black hole, the disappearances of Latif and Rafiq became charged with an excess of meaning, invested with multiple and conflicting explanations by different stakeholders in the hostel.

Absence as authorial disclosure

The basis for all my writing and theorising about absence so far in this chapter is my collection of field notes, an archive of approximately one hundred and forty thousand words and a few hundred photographs. I gathered this material laboriously over the course of three stays in Lahore, eight months of formal fieldwork and approximately eight further months of remote contact with various interlocutors. By foregrounding the time-duration of my research in this way I consciously follow a convention in many ethnographies, where authors specify in their introductions their total length of fieldwork in months and, often, years. The recitation of time in these texts often reads like a guarantor of authenticity, and in our online peer support sessions, we DPhil students engaged in frequent discussions about

the respective duration of our fieldwork. These comparisons focused obsessively on number – six months compared to eight months, five months compared to eleven months – as an indicator of sufficiency or lack. As we anxiously tried to satisfy ourselves about whether we had 'enough' data, we assumed unquestioningly that time in the field, in and of itself, would be sufficient for the generation of precise accounts and authoritative knowledge.

Returning to my field notes, however, made me aware of gaps in my knowledge caused by my own documentation. I noticed sentences and then whole paragraphs that gave me less information about the social phenomena than about my own troubled state of mind at the time. During my fieldwork I often ruminated anxiously about whether I was wasting time or whether my research would come to anything; I struggled with loneliness, physical ailments and the bitter conditions of my field site, and these concerns percolated through to my writing. While Fabian notes a schizogenic attitude to time in anthropological writing, based on the different experiences of time when in the field compared to writing up (Fabian 1983: 21), in my own case I also noticed differences within these two categories - my earlier field notes were far more detailed and comprehensive than the more fragmented and peevish records seven months into my fieldwork. A month after my arrival in Lahore, after having been ill for a few days, I wrote:

> In the evening, I go to get water from downstairs, still feeling very shaky, when I meet Nasima from Room 2. She starts telling me about her cousin who was murdered - I think by her other cousin. He was very young. She shows me pictures of his corpse and says her *khala* (maternal aunt) has been asked to forgive the murderer (who is in jail) but refuses to, and now the family has left her. She says the family is in crisis. She tells me all this very quickly and is perceptibly upset. I want to listen, but am also struggling to stand. (September 2019)

After nearly eight months in the field, my depletion was clearly visible in my records:

> I feel completely fed up and exhausted by all this backwards and forwards business. I lie in my bed, motionless, staring into space. I don't know what to think is coming (sic). (March 2020)

Although it was tempting to castigate myself for what felt like a frustrating lack of usable information, I had to reconcile myself to the fact that my observations and recordings in the field had not been conducted by a machine, but by a feeling and experiencing human body (Pollard 2009). My research capacities were influenced not just by disciplinary training but by personal experience and atmospheric attunements (Stewart 2011), and to overcome my self-criticism I needed to reckon with 'how researchers' lives in their full complexity shape knowledge production' (Günel et al. 2020). Despite my self-image as a feminist researcher with an overtly stated commitment to slow scholarship (Mountz et al. 2015), antiracist practice and an ethics of care, I realised that my expectations of self were still profoundly influenced by the model of an idealised 'care-free' researcher who transcends difficulties to arrive at an omniscient overview. The absences I faced in my own documentation, somewhat counter-intuitively, facilitated an increase in my own self-awareness.

As I began the process of writing up my field notes into drafts of chapters for an eventual thesis, I became aware of another kind of documentary absence –the impulse I felt to remove certain episodes from my writing. In contrast to the absences in documentation described above, some passages in my notes offered intensely detailed descriptions of ethnographic moments, but rereading these passages was so emotionally demanding that I felt unable to engage with them analytically. One of these episodes took place in March 2020, shortly before the unscheduled end of my fieldwork. For some days there had been rumours among the hostel residents that Miss Nazia was thinking of selling or giving up the

hostel, and that she had been seen making an inventory of the furniture and showing another woman around the rooms.

Miss Nazia, however, told me very firmly that she had no plans to leave, although she would be gone for five days to take care of her mother-in-law. “My husband’s mother is very sick with cancer, and I have to look after her,” she explained, sitting on the end of my bed. She looked tearful and distressed, and I felt that she wasn’t much older than me. “It’s very upsetting - you know that she is my aunt as well as my mother-in-law, and it is very hard. For this reason I have asked my husband’s cousin – you can call her Auntie - to come and stay here temporarily, to take care of things while I am busy. You know, last night Rafia texted me to say ‘*Baji*, is it true that you are giving up this hostel?’ - so that is why I am coming today, to tell everyone what is happening and that it is not true that I am leaving. Maybe you heard this rumour?”

“Yes, I did hear that rumour,” I said soberly, looking her in the eye, “because I heard that someone came round and was counting the beds.”

“Yes, I was doing that, darling, but not because I am giving up the hostel. It is because the cousin who is going to be here while I am away is not an especially close cousin, I can’t trust her too much. So I wanted to do a count of the furniture and all the furnishings with her so that nothing goes missing. It is not permanent - this is my home, after all, I am not leaving my home. You can still call me, or you can text me, if you need anything until I am back.”

I was reassured by her words, and sympathetic in the face of her evident distress, and I willingly paid my month’s rent as usual before I left the hostel that day. When I returned that evening, however, an enormous truck was reversing out of the hostel yard, loaded with

bags. When I went into the dining room where Zakiya and Samayya were eating, Zakiya greeted me with a cynical smile: “She has left.”

I was shocked. “Are you sure? She told me just today that she wasn’t leaving…”

“No, she has left. She had taken all her things with her, and she isn’t answering her calls.” Sure enough, when I tried to phone and then texted her, no answer came, although I could see the message had been read. The lack of response created a strange feeling, as if I were speaking to someone with their back turned.

“It feels strange without her,” Zakiya said, slightly wistfully. “You develop an attachment.”

“An attachment?” I repeated disbelievingly. “You hated her!” Zakiya had been warring with Miss Nazia for months.

“You get accustomed to someone,” Zakiya said, shrugging. “I never fought with her.”

Samayya was disapproving of Miss Nazia’s actions. “If she was going to go then she should have called us all together and told us that she is leaving due to some problems, and this is the person she is handing over to. She should have called all the girls’ parents.”

When Tabassum came back from her hospital shift, she was outraged. “Did she think that the girls here are stupid? That they won’t find out? We saw her counting the beds, we heard that she was talking about selling. But we asked her directly and she said, ‘No, I am going just for a short time, I will be back, my mother-in-law is sick.’” At the dinner table that night, she complained bitterly to the new Auntie:

> The previous warden behaved very badly in moving out the way she did. She left without warning us, without introducing us to you and without informing our families. She was in care of us, and she deserted that responsibility. She should have

> been more responsible. These are other people's children she was caring for. I have not told my father. If I told my father that she has left, our families would not allow us to stay here. My family is Pathan, we girls leave our homes with great difficulty.

Feeling discomposed in the evening, I went outside to walk on the balcony. Tabassum had burrowed into her pillows and sealed herself off from the outside world with her headphones. Sehrish, who was walking up and down the roof, paused to greet me and to talk over the day's news. I confessed that I was shocked:

"It feels sudden. Even this morning, she came to talk to me and said she was not leaving."

Sehrish shook her head impatiently. "My friend, just forget all her rubbish speeches. It's meaningless. You can't trust anything she says.'

Like the absence of Rafiq and Latif, Miss Nazia's disappearance created a negative space in which ethical and moral expectations could be articulated. Hostel residents condemned her actions as deceitful and irresponsible, and especially criticised her betrayal of the parents whose daughters were in her care. Miss Nazia's faithlessness towards her residents' parents was spoken of with far more indignation than that shown towards the hostel residents themselves; despite their studies and jobs, women living outside of the parent home were constructed as immature girl-children, entrusted as passive recipients of care by one set of responsible adults to another.

Despite their indignation, however, the hostel residents seemed to take the changeover in their stride. Most planned to stay at least until the end of the month, since if they moved out immediately they would not recoup their deposit, and they planned to see what this 'new Auntie' was like in the meantime – perhaps she would not be so bad. Notwithstanding their censure of Miss Nazia's behaviour, and their initial shock and disapproval, most of the

hostel residents reflected phlegmatically that such behaviour was only to be expected from strangers and non-kin, and that it was important to be sceptical of other people's claims as a result. Indeed, many of the hostel residents viewed a sophisticated attitude of incredulity as an essential attribute for successful modern woman in Pakistan. The disappearance of Miss Nazia became a teachable moment, demonstrating the need for caution and guardedness as a practice of self-care.

Unlike the other hostel residents, however, I experienced this situation as deeply humiliating. I had believed Miss Nazia and trusted her, relying on our mutual connections in England as a guarantor of her reliability. The fact that I had paid my monthly rent before she disappeared that day compounded my mortification when I realised she had left no record of the transaction, and that she had also removed the details of my rent deposit from the hostel records. I felt angry and ashamed at having essentially been robbed, and foolish about my own credulity in comparison to the cynicism among the other hostel residents. My friends' pitying assessments of me as *masoom* (innocent) and *seedhi* (straightforward) made me feel even more embarrassed. "Yasmeen, you were trapped!" chuckled Zakiya, not unsympathetically. She forgivingly explained my innocence in terms of my nationality: "You are not used to people behaving like Nazia, you poor thing (*bechari*), because you are from *outside* *(bahir*). This is how people behave in Pakistan." Although Zakiya and my other friends were sympathetic, their assessment of me as foreign and therefore vulnerable to predation also struck at my self-image, both as a person of Pakistani heritage and as a culturally competent anthropologist. For months that I found it difficult to revisit this period in my fieldwork notes, since every time I tried I felt a mixture of shame, embarrassment and anger. The fact that my fieldwork ended very soon after this, when lockdown was declared in Pakistan and the UK during a planned fieldwork break, made these gaps in my writing

even more alarming. Given my comparatively short fieldwork period of just over eight months, I felt a pressure to wring every drop of meaning out of the corpus of data I had to hand. The inability to draw on particular moments as analysable material felt deeply threatening to my ambition of an academic future.

Although these self-imposed silences felt troubling at the time, my almost involuntary refusal to revisit these sections in my notes for over a year was, I now feel, an unconsciously protective action that gave me time to recover self-esteem and reduce my sense of humiliation. When I finally felt able to attend to those moments, I wrote from the 'haunted location' that Avery Gordon describes, '[striving] to understand the conditions under which a memory was produced in the first place, towards a countermemory, for the future' (Gordon 2008:22). Placing brackets around particularly difficult moments allowed me to gain some analytic distance over time. It also allowed me to rethink the self-imposed sense of urgency in needing to mine my field notes for usable vignettes, as if anthropological field notes were simply 'palimpsests, useless unless plumbed for forgotten revelatory moments, unexpressed longing, and the wounds of regret' (Behar 1996:9). Butalia's conscious refusal to draw on aspects of her own family history, and some of the stories that she was told while gathering oral narratives of Partition, offered a liberating alternative to the need to maximise the utility of every scrap of information:

> I decided…. that I would impose my own silences on this search. I knew by now that the history of Partition was a history of deep violation - physical and mental - for women. I would then talk only to those who wanted to talk about it. And I would continue to explore other sources to help me recover the histories of women.
>
> (Butalia 2000: 104)

Thinking about authorial silence brought me to think about how anthropologists make their presence as observers, collaborators and participants known within their writing. The

reflexive turn in anthropology called for attention to the constructed nature of ethnography (Clifford et al. 2010) and the subjectivity of the anthropologist as author, countering what Donna Haraway calls the 'deadly fantasy' of objectivity through an attention to situated forms of knowledge (Haraway 1991:188). Drawing on personal experiences and subjective reactions is seen as a way to use the body as a research tool, to redress the unequal balance between observer and observed and to subvert the construction of ethnography as objective description of fact (Behar 1996; Meneley & Young 2005; Rosaldo 1993). Such practices are also valued for their compatibility with indigenous models of sociality, information-sharing and knowledge generation, and the possibility for a decolonial research praxis (Chawla & Atay 2018; Smith 2012; Whitinui 2014).

Increased reflexivity and self-disclosure in ethnography, however, brings about its own risks. What Behar describes as the commodification of the autobiographical voice (Behar 1996: 25) can task writers and researchers, particularly those classed as 'insider anthropologists', with the burden of representation while also meaning that their work is dismissed as parochial. The injunction to bring one's 'whole self' to research (Hordge-Freeman 2018) may also not be possible or safe for researchers with stigmatised identities, who may face increased surveillance (Atay 2018) or academic censure as a result. In *An Unquiet Mind,* Jamison discusses her fear of drawing on her own experience of mental illness in her writing for this reason: 'Will my work now be seen by my colleagues as somehow biased because of my illness? …. It is an awful prospect, giving up the cloak of academic objectivity' (Jamison 1995:213). In my own work I have frequently felt the pressure of speaking as a Muslim and mixed-race female scholar about issues of race, gender, identity and religion in ways that have felt uncomfortably personal. Self-disclosure within unequal relations of power can become a burden disproportionately placed on queer

scholars, disabled scholars and scholars of colour, who are variously tasked with speaking 'for' their communities or dismissed as partisan. Instead of being forced to proffer a 'wrenching personal story of the suffering anthropologist' (Behar 1996: 18), authorial absence can become a means of reclaiming dignity, a refusal to offer up oneself for academic consumption.

Absence as ethical research practice

So far, this chapter has outlined three ways of understanding absence – as diagnostic of power, as negative space and as un/conscious authorial disclosure. The underlying argument in presenting these three strategies has been to show that absence can be a productive source of enquiry, not merely a 'problem to be solved' (Fowles and Heupel 2013: 179). By way of conclusion, however, I want to subvert the premise of this argument by questioning the rationale of productivity itself. My final approach to absence upends the logic of scholarly generativity by arguing that absence is more than a potentially rich topic of discussion – it can also become an ethical research practice as a method of scholarly refusal.

Although anthropological understandings of refusal vary, a common theme within different interpretations seems to be one of utility or lack thereof. Sherry Ortner understands ethnographic refusal as a 'refusal of thickness, a failure of holism' (Ortner 2008:44) which elides the ethnographic complexity of forms of resistance; Ortner thus frames refusal as an anthropological inability to do what anthropology should be doing. While Jackson, like Ortner, draws on the idea of 'thinness', he uses the term quite differently to acknowledge 'a way of knowing that privileges continued nonknowing' (Jackson 2013: 153). His view of thinness is far more positive than Ortner's, a way of avoiding anthropological totalism. Weiss and McGranahan, on the other hand, understand refusal as a generative act that can

bring new forms of social process and being to light (McGranahan 2016; Weiss 2016). Their framings of refusal, however, continue to centre the logic of generativity, valuing refusal for what it does.

Against these approaches, I find Audra Simpson's use of refusal the closest to my own understanding of absence as scholarly refusal. Simpson writes of refusal as 'an ethnographic calculus of what you need to know and what I refuse to write…My notion of refusal articulates a mode of sovereign authority over the presentation of ethnographic data, and so does not present "everything"' (Simpson 2014: 105). Simpson's willingness to withhold certain information from the ethnographic record recalls Butalia's decision not to publish particular details about her uncle's experience of Partition, in order to respect their family's privacy (Butalia 2000). Both these approaches choose to engage with absence as a way of demonstrating respect and enacting dignity, rather than in terms of its scholarly utility.

The novelty of this approach to absence comes from its disparity to the totalizing expectations of contemporary commitments to academia. Acutely familiar with the precarity and casualization of the neoliberal university, my cohort of fellow students and I had uncritically accepted a need to always be 'on' in order to succeed within the academy (Scharff 2016; Scharff 2018). Many of us felt that we had had to sacrifice personal commitments in pursuit of scholarship (Gill 2014), and many of us had internalized an expectation to grasp every opportunity in order to maximize the value of our research. While we, as students and precarious early career researchers, were particularly susceptible to discourses of neoliberal productivity within the academy, the widespread response to the Covid-19 pandemic across the university sector demonstrated a generalized expectation to prioritise research and output above all else. Anthropology departments across the UK held online sessions on digital research methods, seminars were held discussing ways to conduct

research remotely and an online document was circulated that offered ideas for carrying out digital ethnography (Lupton 2020). An increased interest in methodologies of 'patchwork ethnography', which recognises the growing unfeasibility of traditional models of long-term fieldwork (Günel et al. 2020) attested to the fact that anthropologists were considering novel ways of continuing research in changing global conditions.

The existential threat of Covid-19, however, made me feel an increasing distaste for the assumption that academics should simply pivot to alternative methods in order to continue their projects. Advocating a wholesale shift to digital methods seemed to reproduce an unreflective prioritisation of research at all costs, without acknowledgement of the risks to life, health, wellbeing and care that many of us were experiencing as a result of the pandemic. Alongside the unrealistic demands placed on researchers, the focus on continuing research through digital means felt extremely exploitative of research participants and interlocutors. After a widespread lockdown was enacted in Pakistan, I spoke often to Tabassum on the phone. She had been drafted into working on a COVID-19 ward in a hospital without PPE, and was sleeping in the hospital between shifts since there was no transport to and from the hospital. With all the burdens placed on Tabassum, the last thing that I felt like doing was trying to extract information from her that I could work into a thesis. The very idea felt vampiric.

Anthropology has a long tradition of testimony, providing documentation of the lived experiences of bereavement, injustice and cruelty (Das 2007; Scheper-Hughes 1992; Zani 2019). While honouring and acknowledging this tradition, I want to suggest that sometimes a more ethical response, particularly in the context of the neoliberal university, is of refusing to engage with practices of scholarship where we as researchers benefit through publications, job opportunities and professional success from renditions of other people's

pain. Recalling McGranahan's characterisation of refusal as generative of new possibilities (McGranahan 2016), choosing to strategically absent ourselves from a systemically unjust system of academic competition might offer the possibility of collectively organising against precarity, or of campaigning for public health equities and the redistribution of global resources. Absence might thereby offer a way of 'giving up', not as defeat, but as a wilful act of scholarly solidarity and feminist refusal (Guyotte et al. 2021).

In this chapter, I have argued for a view of absence as generative in multiple ways. By thinking through my fieldwork as well as my autoethnographic experiences of scholarship and the academy, I have proposed four ways of theorising absence; as a diagnostic of power and resistance, as an indicator of negative space, as un/conscious authorial disclosure and as ethical choice within research. In doing so, however, I want to emphasise that an approach to absence does not always have to be generative to be worthwhile. The fact that thinking through absence can be productive should not justify a logic of productivity – instead, I want to suggest that thinking through absence can help us to take a more measured stance to the impulse to be active and purposeful, by attending to the meaning of what is not present as much as what is.

Conclusion

In this thesis, I have explored the lives of women living in an urban hostel in Pakistan from several angles. I have argued that life in privately-run hostels entails a significant amount of psychic and emotional hardship, brought on by financial exploitation perpetrated by hostel authorities, conflict with co-residents and repeated experiences of humiliation and petty forms of tyranny. Girls often arrive to live in hostel settings due to their desire to become educated, but, as we have seen, education does not always deliver what it promises. Although they aspire towards academic and career success, girls are often stymied by patriarchal social arrangements, gender-insensitive working conditions, the neoliberal marketisation of education and globally inequitable border regimes.

The shortfall in the promise of education, however, does not mean that girls living in hostels are not engaged in learning. While living in the hostel setting, girls learn how to share space at close quarters with others and how to perform gendered and classed acts of personal boundary maintenance to safeguard themselves as moral subjects (Shroff 2020). Girls learn how to combine a trust in God's ultimate benignity with mistrust in other humans, how to work on their physical and sartorial appearance to present themselves as modern, 'groomed' women, and how to inhabit imagined landscapes that extend far beyond the provincial capital of Lahore. Above all, girls take the experiences of humiliation, shame and financial entrapment that they experience in the environment of the hostel as material for the cultivation of attitudes that include patience, forbearance, resignation and endurance. The hostel is conceptualised as a key environment for the acquisition of these skills and knowledge because of its distinctive location both in space – in Pakistani urban centres, offering access to education and career opportunities, exposure to multitudinous diversity and increased possibilities for leisure and consumption – and in time – at an interstitial stage

of girls' lives, bracketed between childhood under the care of parents in the natal home and adult responsibilities in the marital household. Girls living in the liminal space between these life-stages use their time in the hostel to acquire skills that they hope will prepare them for uncertain futures.

The abrupt ending of my fieldwork means that I end the thesis with a new set of questions to the ones proposed in the introduction. Despite doxic notions of marriage as a non-negotiable life event for young women, it is clear that at least one person described in this thesis, Malalai, managed successfully to use the hostel to evade marriage and familial oversight. Is this a behaviour that might be more widely mirrored among other hostel girls, and how might this challenge the construction of hostel life as an interstitial period that precedes, and is inevitably ended by, marriage and hegemonic femininity? Will increasing possibilities for digitally sharing information about hostels change the attitude of caution involved in choosing hostels, and alter the relationship between hostel talk and hostel horror stories? Finally, towards the end of my fieldwork period I heard of girls who were considering renting entire flats or 'portions' of houses and living without the supervision of a warden in a non-hostel environment. To what extent will such options for accommodation change the expectation that the hostel is the only viable accommodation for unchaperoned women in the city, and what forms of autonomy and control might be exercised in this new environment? While some research explores women's independent accommodation options in Delhi (Bernroider 2018) further research is required to explore experiences of hostels and changing urban space in the context of Pakistan.

Lahore's size and significance as the second-largest city in Pakistan, and its status as both a cultural capital and a global city, renders it an interesting site in which to study dynamics of rural-urban migration, urban exploration and experience and the classed and

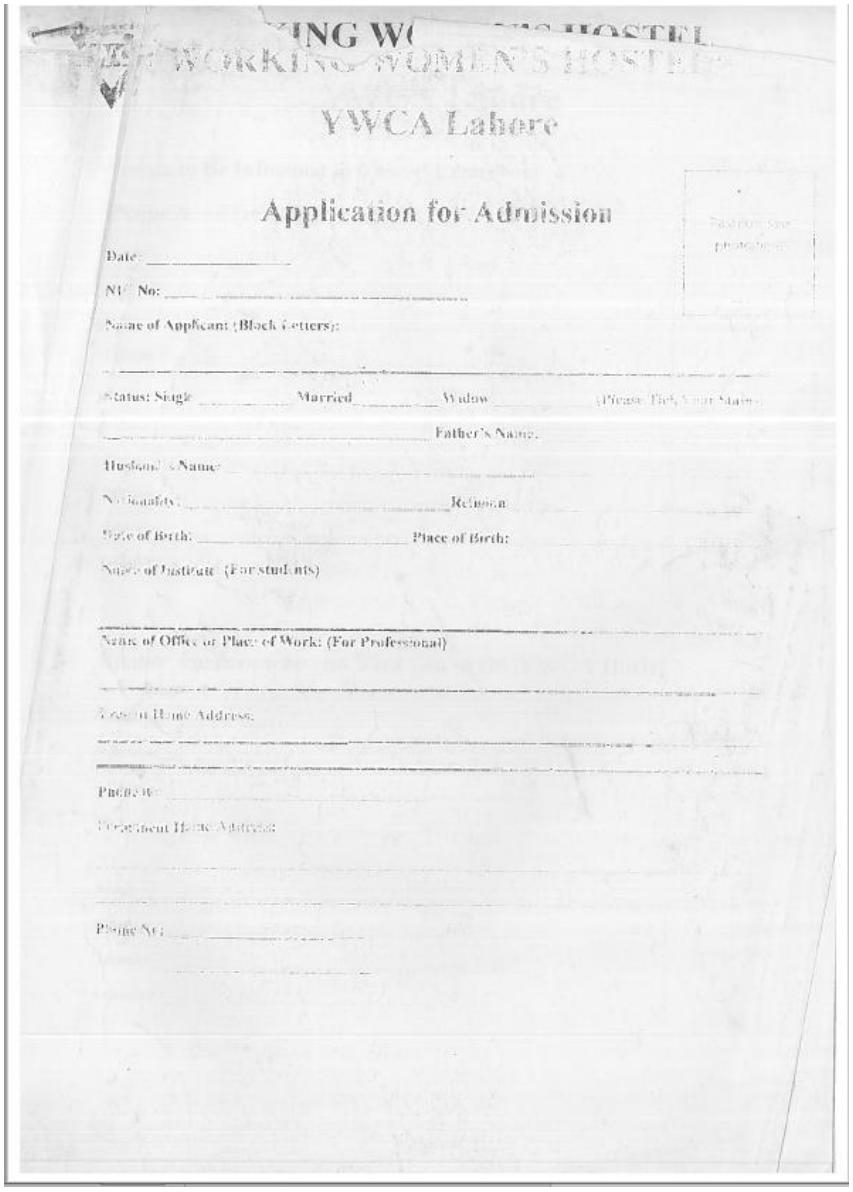
gendered inhabitation of space. The very importance of Lahore, however, raises questions about the extent to which the patterns observed in this thesis might be replicated among hostel girls in other Pakistani cities. Do migrants to smaller cities, such as Faisalabad in Punjab, or other provincial capitals like Quetta in Balochistan, experience a similar sense of having arrived as a world subject because of their urban migration? Are qualities of backwardness lived as vividly in smaller provincial cities? Further research on Pakistani women's hostels would benefit from a geographic focus outside Lahore.

Further research would also enable a more complete understanding of one of the key questions that this thesis began with – how hostel residence fits into the life trajectories of middle-class women in Pakistan. Based on the eight months' of fieldwork I completed between August 2019 and March 2020, I have argued that hostel life is an opportunity for the acquisition of specific skills. However, my lack of knowledge about how the continuing life courses of many of my interlocutors means that I cannot say with any certainty whether their learning manifested in the ways that they anticipated – the ability to endure, be patient and forbear – or whether other consequences, less expected, also followed from their residence in hostels. The disruption caused by the pandemic has meant that I have lost touch with many of my previous hostelmates, friends and interlocutors, but I have remained in touch with a small number and I continue to hope to return to Pakistan in the future. Longitudinal research with the same population over a number of years would, I hope, help me towards greater understanding of the significance of hostel residence as a life-stage for women. However, I also want to argue that what is described in this thesis does not necessarily need to be read forward into the future in order to be of analytic importance. Part of the significance of the hostel itself as a distinctly liminal time-space was the unknown nature of the futures anticipated by residents. In presenting a snapshot of the emotions,

experiences, attitudes and learnings of hostel girls at one particular point in their lives, without the possibility of reading forward, I seek to mirror the uncertainty that hostel girls contemplated in their future lives and show how this uncertainty became translated into the need ‘to be ready for anything.’

Appendix 1: Application form for YWCA Lahore Working Women's Hostel

This application form for entry into the Working Women's Hostel at YWCA Lahore was given to me when I visited there during my fieldwork period. I present it here to provide documentary evidence of the types of rules and regulations in place at particular hostels, most notably institutionally-based hostels.



YWCA Lahore

Application for Admission

Date: _____

NIC No: _____

Name of Applicant: (Block Letters):

_____

Status: Single _____ Married _____ Widow _____ (Please Tick Your Status)

_____ Father's Name:

Husband's Name: _____

Nationality: _____ Religion: _____

Date of Birth: _____ Place of Birth: _____

Name of Institute: (For students)

_____

Name of Office or Place of Work: (For Professional)

_____

Present Home Address:

_____

_____

Phone No:

Permanent Home Address:

_____

_____

Phone No: _____

WORKING WOMEN'S HOSTEL

YWCA Lahore

Person to Be Informed in Case of Emergency

(Name & Address):

Name: _____

Relation: _____

Address: _____

Contact #: _____

Passport size Photo here

Name: _____

Relation: _____

Address: _____

Contact#: _____

Passport size Photo here

Visitor's names who can Visit you in the YWCA Hostel

Name: _____

Relation: _____

Address: _____

Contact #: _____

Passport size Photo here

Name: _____

Relation: _____

Address: _____

Contact #: _____

Passport size Photo here

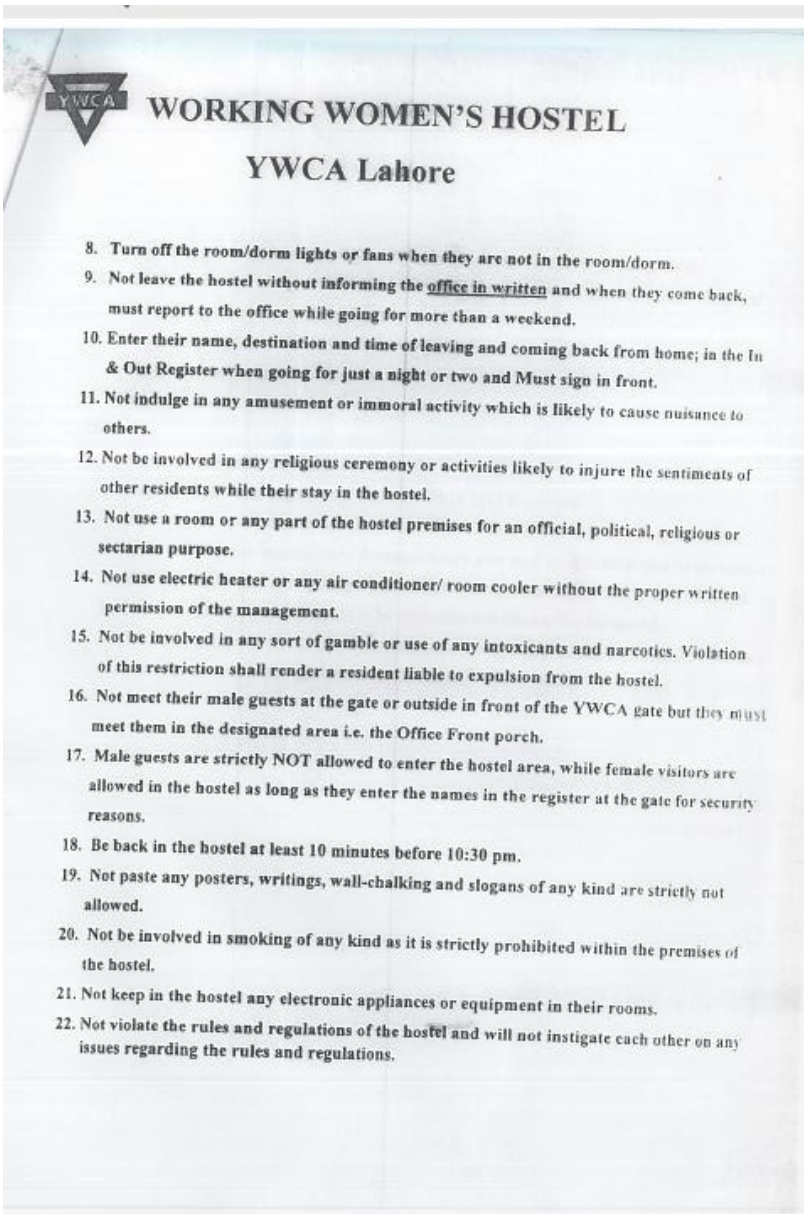
WORKING WOMEN'S HOSTEL

YWCA Lahore

RULES AND REGULATIONS:

All Hostel residents shall

1. **Occupy a room/Dorm with only due allotment.**
   They shall not transfer or exchange the allotted room/ dorm with each other without the permission of the authorities.
2. **Be responsible for the articles and shall return them to the hostel authority when leaving the hostel. The piece of furniture assigned to a girl in every room/dorm shall not be shifted from it without permission.**
3. **Have to pay the cost of in case of any breakage or damage of any of the hostel assets.**
   In addition to this any disciplinary action may be taken against her.
   Therefore, each of them must take care of the Hostel belongings.
4. **Be responsible for keeping their own rooms tidy and clean all the time.**
   They shall not dispose of litter in the corridor or other parts and corners of the hostel premises.
5. **Hand over one Key of the Allotted Room to the Office.**
   Every part of the hostel shall be open to the hostel authorities for inspection at any time during day or night.
   The allotted room can be opened for official use, maintenance, audit or inspection at any time even in absence of the resident.
   Therefore, keep your rooms, beds, tables neat and tidy before leaving the hostel for duty or home.
6. **Not tamper with the room door locks nor should they change the fittings.**
   Learn to be responsible, and will not lose their keys every now and then.
   A fine for Rs. 100/- shall be charged for each time you lose the keys.
7. **Be responsible for their personal valuable articles or cash left in the rooms. Such as computers, watches, Jewellery etc.**



WORKING WOMEN'S HOSTEL

YWCA Lahore

8. Turn off the room/dorm lights or fans when they are not in the room/dorm.
9. Not leave the hostel without informing the office in written and when they come back, must report to the office while going for more than a weekend.
10. Enter their name, destination and time of leaving and coming back from home; in the In & Out Register when going for just a night or two and Must sign in front.
11. Not indulge in any amusement or immoral activity which is likely to cause nuisance to others.
12. Not be involved in any religious ceremony or activities likely to injure the sentiments of other residents while their stay in the hostel.
13. Not use a room or any part of the hostel premises for an official, political, religious or sectarian purpose.
14. Not use electric heater or any air conditioner/ room cooler without the proper written permission of the management.
15. Not be involved in any sort of gamble or use of any intoxicants and narcotics. Violation of this restriction shall render a resident liable to expulsion from the hostel.
16. Not meet their male guests at the gate or outside in front of the YWCA gate but they must meet them in the designated area i.e. the Office Front porch.
17. Male guests are strictly NOT allowed to enter the hostel area, while female visitors are allowed in the hostel as long as they enter the names in the register at the gate for security reasons.
18. Be back in the hostel at least 10 minutes before 10:30 pm.
19. Not paste any posters, writings, wall-chalking and slogans of any kind are strictly not allowed.
20. Not be involved in smoking of any kind as it is strictly prohibited within the premises of the hostel.
21. Not keep in the hostel any electronic appliances or equipment in their rooms.
22. Not violate the rules and regulations of the hostel and will not instigate each other on any issues regarding the rules and regulations.

WORKING WOMEN'S HOSTEL

YWCA Lahore

2: **Television Lounge: (Color television facility with cable)**

3: **Dining Room: (refrigerator)**

7: **Ceiling fans and Tube lights: The authorities have already fixed.**
In case of the tube Light fuses, the residents will manage on their own.
The electrician will be called upon request.

8: **Hot water : Each bathroom is through with the hot water facility in the Winter months.**

9: **Water Facility : 24 hours supply of water is available.**

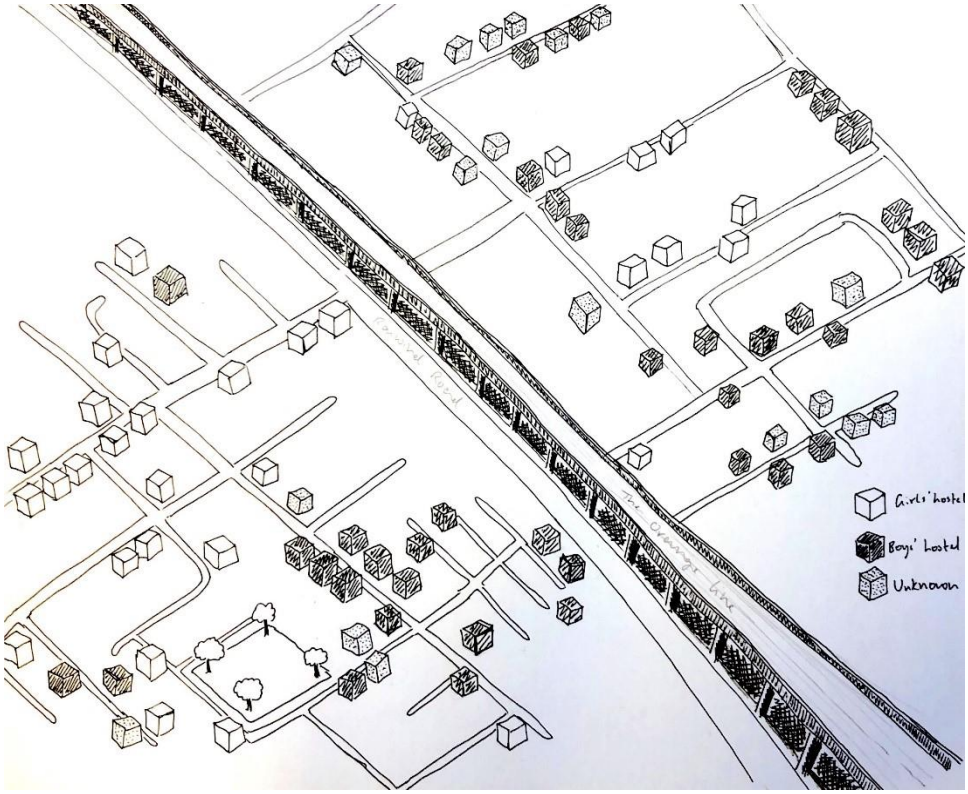
HOSTEL Room Charges:

- **Single room: Rs 5980/- per month.**
- **Double Room: Two girls per room: Rs. 5450/- each**
- **Dormitory: Four girls per room: 4950/- each**
- **One time Charges.**
  Form charges: Rs. 50/-
  Affidavit: Rs. 100/-
- **Security deposit (Refundable) equal to Two month's Room Charges**

The above charges will include:
Room facility, **Electricity, Water & gas charges.**

Monthly rent Must be paid in advance every month, the dead line is 10th of every month.

Appendix 2: A map of Amber Town showing the location of boys' and girls' hostels



Appendix 3: hostel names and demographics in Amber Town

Name	Demographic
Superior Girls	Girls
Al-Haram	Girls
Hafiz Girls Hostel	Girls
Lahore Girls Hostel	Girls
Al Riaz Girls Hostel	Girls
Superior group	Girls
Sayyida Fatema	Girls
Professional Boys Hostel	Boys
Malika Girls	Girls
Bukhari Girls	Girls
Royal	Girls
Imperial	Girls
Eshaal	Girls
Al Hadia	Girls
Badar	unknown
Homify	Girls
Executive	Boys
Residencia – the bachelors accommodation	Boys
Uncle's hostel	Boys
Sheikh Palace	Boys
Heaven Group of Hostels	Girls
Stay Well	Boys
Homes	Boys
Gharana	Boys
Aunty's Hostel	Boys
2nd home	Boys
Luxury Hostel	Boys
Hijab Girls hostel	Girls
Jannat Girls Hostel	Girls
Al nisa Hostel	Girls
Al Aziz Girls Hostel	Girls
Heaven Girls Hostel	Girls
Al Madina hostel	Girls
Supreme Boys Hostel	Boys
Ideal Boys Hostel	Boys
Rajput boys Hostel	Boys
Graduate Boys Hostel	Boys

Heaven Hostel	Girls
Amma da hostel	Girls
Spring Girls Hostel	Girls

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