

Reconfiguring the Native Informant: Positionality in the Global Age

I am very aware that what I say against the *Haddood* and other laws can be twisted by western representations. CNN and *60 Minutes* have been in touch with us at Simorgh. They want to come and look at *zina*, and will we help them. . . . So one is caught. . . . Here is another opportunity to create pressure on the government, but we don't want to perpetuate more stereotypes. So at this point I am [left] thinking: Does the *Haddood* Ordinance provide another reason [to westerners] to bomb us out of existence and into obedience? It is infuriating.¹

These comments were made in December 1998 by Neelam Husain, almost three years before the events of September 11. She was at the time a coordinator of a women's group in Lahore and one of the activists I had interviewed for my research on women imprisoned under the *Zina* Ordinance in Pakistan. In our post-September 11 world, her comments take on a prophetic brilliance. In fact this article is in part a response to Husain's concerns, and increasingly my own, that criticism of patriarchal practices, including those surrounding the *Zina* Ordinance in Pakistan, might be used to support western military agendas.²

Introduction

Speaking of the excesses of the *Zina* Ordinance and wanting to bring about social change in Pakistan situates me in a theoretical and political

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¹ Interview with Neelam Husain, Lahore, Pakistan, December 1998.

² I prefer to use certain words in lower case, e.g., *western*, *west*, and *third world*, to deemphasize the sensationalization that I believe largely accompanies their usage.

double bind. Referring to the Algerian context, Marie-Aimée Hélie-Lucas has identified a similar conundrum for women who critique the sexism within their communities—they are silenced by the fear of being accused of betrayal by community members (1999, 278). Living in Canada, I too risk such accusations. Moreover, as I have explored elsewhere (Khan 2001), I am aware that criticism of third-world cultures often serves to further demonize and stereotype third-world peoples, reinforcing a view that, as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1999) reminds us, seeks to free brown women from brown men. These comments are particularly relevant in the current post–September 11 context of blatant Islamophobia, where racial profiling of Muslims is open and largely unchallenged.

Speaking about *zina* victims positions me in a potentially paralyzing situation. To find a way out, two simultaneous projects are needed. One project requires a historicized analysis of the *Zina* Ordinance and its effects. I have done that elsewhere (Khan 2004). For the second project I must situate myself as a native informant who informs not only on the effects of the *Zina* Ordinance in Pakistan but also on its reading in the west. The many interrelated yet invisible layers of native informing, including comments from expatriate researchers, from Pakistani activists, and from incarcerated Pakistani women become integrated into the knowledge produced through my research. Such a collaborative model of epistemology and political action, I believe, allows us to rethink the relationship between researcher and informant and contributes to recent reconfigured conversations about native informing. At the same time I call for a collaborative production of knowledge about women's oppressions (researchers' and multiple informants') to go hand in hand with feminist solidarity politics that seek to change the oppressive conditions being researched. This model would allow us to position women to challenge not only patriarchal practices in Pakistan but also the interlinked effects of racialization, globalization, and militarization. Such an analysis allows me to produce an account that is neither orientalist nor apologetic and to work toward building transnational feminist solidarity. But first, what is the *Zina* Ordinance, and what context gave rise to it?

The *Zina* Ordinance

Zina means illicit sex, both adultery and fornication. The *Zina* Ordinance comes out of a social, historical, and political process that connects religion to nation building. Although these connections have been present since the creation of Pakistan, they intensified during the rule of General Zia-ul-Haq (1977–88), who usurped power from democratically elected Prime

Minster Zulfikar Ali Bhutto in 1977. Zia attributed many of Pakistan's social and political problems to an "un-Islamic way of life" (Ahmad 1992), identifying a lack of individual and societal morals as responsible for social woes. The solution to these ills, Zia believed, was a program of Islamization, the *Nizam-e-Mustapha* (governance inspired by the Prophet). Zia's Islamization, Aijaz Ahmad (1992) notes, included a form of collective purification through the removal of impure and undesirable elements from society, either by death or imprisonment. Beginning in 1979, the brutal fist of the Pakistan army enforced a series of laws and ordinances to ensure this purification.³

General Zia's tenure in power also coincided with a U.S. policy of containment of communism, including the influences of the Soviet Union as well as those emanating from left-leaning indigenous organizations. As part of this policy, Tariq Ali (2002) notes, U.S. foreign policy actively supported Islamic fundamentalists who aligned themselves with the west. Zia was one such fundamentalist who soon became an indispensable U.S. ally in the war against the communists in Afghanistan. His alliance with the United States largely shielded him from international criticism regarding his oppressive religion-based policies and ordinances. These U.S. foreign policies then helped strengthen the military dictator who proclaimed the *Zina* Ordinance, and, as I argue later on in this discussion, it is U.S. foreign policies again that are currently helping to keep it alive and well in Pakistan.

The *Zina* Ordinance (also referred to as the *zina* laws) is part of the *Hadood* ordinances promulgated by President Zia in 1979 as a first step toward Islamization in Pakistan. The *Zina* Ordinance, among other things, covers adultery, fornication, rape, and prostitution under the rubric *zina* and treats them as offenses against the state. The ordinance makes no distinction among the levels of proof required to sentence someone for rape or adultery. Under the terms of the law, victims of rape have been convicted of adultery (because they acknowledge intercourse) and the accused released for lack of evidence. If convicted under the ordinance, the rape victim is sentenced to one hundred lashes if unmarried and death by stoning if married (Shaheed and Mumtaz 1987). Although there have been a few convictions over the years, no sentence entailing stoning to death has been carried out so far. Despite the low conviction rate (5 percent), research shows that thousands of women have been charged and jailed under the *Zina* Ordinance and that the repercussions of the ordi-

³ For a more comprehensive discussion of the context that gave rise to the *Zina* Ordinance and that which continues to sustain it, see Khan 2004.

nance are class based. That is, women who cannot afford lawyers are those who are the most likely to be charged and jailed (Zia 1997). Although many of the prisoners are released upon trial, they face years of incarceration before trial. Critics of the ordinance argue that the *Zina* Ordinance allows families to draw on the power of the state to help regulate the sexuality of “their” women and reclaim family honor, contributing to the growing incidence of state-sanctioned violence against women.⁴

Writing *Zina* in/for the west

I have argued elsewhere (Khan 2001) that a descriptive presentation of third-world women’s oppression strengthens relativist perspectives that present ahistorical accounts or problematic cultural explanations of events. Similarly, conventional accounts of the effects of the *Zina* Ordinance, I fear, might sensationalize the regulation of Pakistani women’s sexuality, evoking images of the “other” woman caught in illicit sex and jailed by her fundamentalist society. Victims of *zina* laws might become the new hot topic, generating countless student assignments and magazine articles, and, like the victims of Taliban atrocities, raising consciousness about the issues. Husain’s comments remind us that such consciousness-raising is important not only for generating awareness but also as a tool for pressuring local and international power brokers. Yet, as she notes, it is not without a price. Such awareness could also help generate rescue missions. The bombing of Afghanistan provides an example. Statements by western politicians that Afghan women needed to be saved preceded U.S. military action following 9/11. Images and commentary of veiled and confined Afghan women helped construct a justification for the invasion of the country. The invasion of Afghanistan did indeed help dislodge the Taliban from power; however, the situation of Afghan women remains bleak. True, the veil is no longer mandatory, but there is little employment, and violence on the street has increased.

Husain’s clear-sighted analysis predates the events of September 11. She was aware that all the hard work that she and other Pakistani activists were involved in might be sidelined in favor of a sensational story. I was also warned about the implications of my research by Rehana Yasmin, the female superintendent who was present throughout the interviews I conducted with the women incarcerated under the *zina* laws at Kot Lakpat prison in Lahore.⁵ Yasmin was concerned that the women’s stories could

⁴ Jahangir and Jilani 1988; Mehdi 1997; Shaheed 1997; Toor 1997; Rouse 1998.

⁵ Interview with Rehana Yasmin, Lahore, Pakistan, 1998.

be used to defame Pakistan to the outside world. Yasmin's point is well taken. She, like me, is uneasy about a western reading of accounts about the Muslim other.

A Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) documentary titled "Murder in Purdah," which aired in January 1999 on the program *National Magazine*, illustrates our concerns. The opening segment begins with the words, "Women are jailed on the rumor of adultery in Pakistan, and men kill their wives to protect their honor." Commentator Brian Stuart then warns us that some of the scenes we are about to see may be disturbing. The text goes on to inform us, "Riffat and Ahson married without parental permission and Karachi exploded." The juxtaposition of text and image is dominated by a narrative of the rise of Islamic fundamentalism, which is connected to an eruption of violence. Scenes depict terrifying images of armed male Pakistanis rioting in the streets, burning, shooting, and looting. None of the mayhem in Karachi is shown to be related to the devaluation of the rupee and the resulting rise in food and fuel prices, or to the lack of employment opportunities and growing poverty and degradation connected to globalization. There is no evidence of investigative reporting on the easy availability of firearms, a legacy of the Afghan war in which the Pakistani government under Zia, financially and morally encouraged by the United States and Saudi Arabia, aided and abetted the Afghan rebels. Instead, the presentation suggests that the people of Karachi, the financial capital of Pakistan and a major seaport on international trade routes, have nothing better to do than worry about who marries whom. Moreover, the only hope of survival that Riffat and Ahson have is to find asylum outside of the Muslim world. In simplistic terms the couple is seen as victims of their society, culture, and religion, and their salvation lies in their escape to the west.

I too am complicit in the process of helping westerners save Pakistanis. In recent months, attorneys in the United States have sought my "expert" advice in cases pertaining to middle-class women who, unlike the impoverished ones I met during the course of my research, have managed to run away from their families. I am aware that if these women do not escape the reach of their families they will be maimed or killed. But I am also aware that my comments frequently reinforce the commonly held views that west is best and west is the place of civilization where all must go to be saved. Several women have benefited from my testimony and have indeed been granted asylum. The format of the affidavits I produce reinforces comments that Kamala Visweswaran has made elsewhere—that the researcher's complicity is fueled by "the social organization of knowledge and the structure of inquiry" (1994, 47). In these affidavits I am

not able to produce a historically grounded account of the *Zina* Ordinance and its effects. Nor am I able to identify the ways U.S. foreign policy has affected the proclamation and retention of the ordinance as law. It is extremely difficult to generate these affidavits. I know immigration judges will read them, and I know my work will help further their bias against other Muslims (particularly men) seeking asylum or work visas or in cases where they have been suspected of terrorism.

By situating myself within a multilayered process, I am able to identify the contradictory and contested location from which I inform for the west. But I can also use this location to identify how geography, racialized culture, and politics help shape the debates on the *zina* laws.

Problematizing native informing

Anthropologists identify the native informant as the person who translates her culture for the researcher, the outsider. It is a process, Trinh T. Minh-ha reminds us, through which the natives as subjects of research become “the handicapped who cannot represent themselves and have to either be represented or learn how to represent themselves” (1989, 59).

In recent years scholars have criticized an unproblematic use of this role in the knowledge production process (Visweswaran 1994; Spivak 1995; Narayan 1997). Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson have called for a continued rethinking and revitalization of anthropological fieldwork so that we move toward “a sense of a mode of study that cares about, and pays attention to, the interlocking of multiple social-political sites and locations” (1997, 37). Gupta and Ferguson suggest that we identify and examine places, peoples, and predicaments through more flexible ethnographical studies that are able to take advantage of the opportunities generated by such flexibility.

One such predicament is that of a third-world researcher who lives and works in the first world yet whose field of research is a third-world site. With more researchers from other regions living in and writing from western diasporic locations, the one who researches *over there* may not be white or male. She, like myself, may be a racialized woman, and although she lives and works in the first world, she is not seen as part of it. As such she is not only on the perimeter of the male academy but also on the fringes of liberal feminism. Perhaps she is an excolonial critical of continued colonialism in its new forms. Marta Savigliano has noted that colonial discourse works to keep such an insubordinate (ex)colonial in her place (1995, 11). My analysis challenges this process, as it extends the idea of the “field” so that it includes not only the site *over there* where I search

for answers to research questions but also includes a second site *over here* where my research will be read.

Trinh has further identified the study of the native and the information she provides as scientific gossip (1989, 59). Such studies are also processes in which the researchers reference one another. This is particularly problematic for researchers who are investigating their “own” cultures. Speaking about Asian Americans, Karen Su notes that researchers have become cultural ambassadors and are under pressure to act as “authentic” authorities on Asian culture (1999, 35). Su identifies this pressure as stemming from an “ethnographic imperative” through which authors assume the role of the native informant.

I too have been recruited into this role. Literary, cultural, and political pressures over here position me as a unitary subject, a third-world native informant (re)producing the voice of alterity. Situated in the west and producing accounts of *zina* laws in the voice of the other woman, I am in a bind. I am damned if I do, and I am damned if I don’t. As Trinh recommends, “You try to and keep on trying to unsay it, for if you don’t, they will not fail to fill in the blanks on your behalf, and you will be said” (1989, 80). Armed with the language of social science, I too contribute to a voyeurism legitimized by social science. At the same time I take seriously Trinh’s directive that we acknowledge the “irreducibility of the object studied and the impossibility of delivering its presence, reproducing it *as it is* in its truth, reality, and otherness” (1989, 70). For I do not make any claims about producing authentic knowledge about Pakistani culture. Instead, I complicate the process of knowledge production and claim that you, the reader, can only know about my research with imprisoned women in Pakistan via an analysis of my own location in the west. The process of locating myself disrupts the conflation of the other woman over there and the one who speaks for her here. Although the two women are situated differently, they and we have intertwined histories. Interrogating those histories allows me to understand how the production of knowledge is related to its reception and how my account of the *zina* laws and their effects is connected to my ambivalent positioning within the academy.

Native informant over here

In the imagination of the nation that I call home, Canada, stereotypical images of third-world women suggest fixed, static identities of passive oppressed victims who are subservient to men. In the case of Muslim women the list also suggests that she is veiled, exotic, and oppressed by

Islam (Alloula 1986; Ahmed 1992). As Spivak suggests, white capitalist culture accepts native informants to the extent that we “museumize” or exoticize our national origin (1999, 398).

Racialized identity, which accompanies this process, is usually situated within ethnic or multicultural studies, where I and other women of color perform our versions of authenticity and difference. Although these spaces do provide us with anchors to our identity and at times access to funds allocated for minority studies, they are also problematic. With its emphasis on examinations of events within predetermined cultural and national borders, ethnic studies exacerbates the binaries that reinforce views of orientalism and particularism as two sides of the same coin (Chow 1993, 6). This process discourages an examination of the west and east as interconnected and instead encourages a focus on the two as ontological absolutes.

Within such a paradigm, performing a critique of the *Zina* Ordinance and speaking of its excesses would present a first-class sensational spectacle commanding attention as I, the authentic feminist voice of Pakistan, generate a text that appears to condemn all Pakistanis, Muslims, and other nonwhite people. Or even worse, our struggles might be co-opted and appropriated within liberal discourse so that we become, as Trinh reminds us, someone’s private zoo (1989, 82). The depoliticization that accompanies such ghettoization and appropriation allows for, as critical theorists Paul Gilroy (1987) and Ali Rattansi ([1992] 1994) have pointed out, a containment of ethnicity that does not provide space for an examination of what is at stake in terms of local and international contestations and hierarchies. Homogenous fixity, a hallmark of racialized stereotyping, is deployed to freeze the other in time, both there and here. Such practices service the neoimperial projects in Muslim societies and also contain the aspirations for equality of racialized people within first-world societies. For as native informants are invited to speak about oppressions that women face in the third world, the concerns of indigenous and racialized women are minimized.

There is another aspect to this process. My colleagues in Canada expect me to do research on Pakistani or other third-world women. In Pakistan, however, I am considered not Pakistani enough. Although I was welcomed by local activists during recent research trips, their comments suggested that I was not one of them. “For an outsider you seem to know quite a bit about what is going on here,” one Pakistani journalist commented after she had read my work. Others argued that I was not a stakeholder in negotiating the issues in the same sense that they were because I did

not share their risks. I was positioned differently. Some remarked, “You will go back to your academy and write your research and we will have to continue to deal with the antiwoman laws,” while others commented, “After all, this law does not really affect you, you are an outsider, you come and go.” These comments led me to ask: Was I misreading and mistranslating cultural cues? Was I somehow seen as a traitor or unworthy because I had left? It is likely that Pakistani feminists are leery about committing energy to relationships with researchers who, as they say, come and go.

Feminist discourse both here and there is marginal to mainstream debates. I am an outsider to marginalized feminist debates in Canada because I am not white, and in Pakistan because I do not live there. Situated as other of the other, I am reminded that the position of native informant is precarious. The native informant is an authority on third-world women. The authority of my claims, however, is continuously deferred to the western academy for legitimization, identifying once again my complicity in reproducing the master narrative about third-world peoples. Such a process suggests that my research is not relevant to Pakistani struggles.

How then do I respond to the idea that I may not be authentic enough to be taken seriously by Pakistani activists and feminists? It is true that I am located differently from Pakistani activists. Yet as a former Pakistani national and now a visitor to Pakistan I am subject to all Pakistani laws, including the *zina* laws. I am not, however, subject to the coercive power of the state in the same way that Pakistani citizens are. I can, unlike activists in Pakistan, return back to my home and my academic position in Canada. Although some feminists and activists in Pakistan may determine my work there to be inconsequential, I do not accept that my work is irrelevant. As a feminist committed to change, I believe that patriarchy in the west supports patriarchy in the third world, including in Pakistan. As feminists come together in international collaborative projects, they can identify the ways in which patriarchy and capitalism work across national borders. Through this understanding we can imagine and forge more internationally based resistance. True, I am new to the Pakistani research scene, but my continuing commitment to the issues in Pakistan will help me to build solidarity with local feminists. We have much in common. As Spivak (1999) reminds us, we are all products of colonial and neocolonial education and complicit in the production of knowledge about the gendered subaltern whom we claim to represent.

Native informant over there

As the third-world woman over there speaks her truth in countless oral and pictorial testimonies for western consumption, hierarchies among women in the third world are frequently dismissed. For example, the third-world woman is largely presented as oppressed and voiceless, leaving the activists who struggle for human rights and women's rights largely invisible (Mani 1990; James 1998). In Pakistan impoverished women face *zina* charges and imprisonment, but middle-class women activists, as well as others who are trying to secure these women's release, are confronted with the sexism and corruption of government officials.⁶ They also have to deal with being labeled "westernized," partly in response to the foreign funding their nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) receive. But there is another reason as well. The NGOs frequently identify themselves as secular, a designation that puts them at odds with the increasingly fundamentalist rhetoric of the state. As the weak Pakistani state moves toward closer alignment with fundamentalist forces, many secular activists have commented to me that the space for their social and political action feels increasingly narrow. Indeed, many claim they are able to negotiate the system safely only because of their personal and family connections. Additionally, faith-based organizations and secular NGOs frequently do not work well together. As one activist working with a woman's rights NGO claimed, "We do not have the same vision of women's role in the family. The faith-based organizations want family unifications at all cost, while we want to present other options to her. They want the woman to be literate in order to read the Qur'an. We want her to be able to read and write and to know her rights under the law."

Moreover, the secular activists are susceptible to charges that they are westernized and therefore, like myself, irrelevant to local struggles. Attempts to dismiss feminism as a western import have been persuasively challenged by Uma Narayan (1997), who argues that charges of westernization are connected to a desire to uphold the east-west binary, which sustains an inability to view issues as interlinked in an international frame for resistance. Third-world women's concerns are generated by issues arising from their own national contexts and fueled by a history grounded in women's resistance to subordination (Anzaldúa [1987] 1999; Narayan 1997). Although these concerns are similar to those put forward in fem-

⁶ The ways in which middle-class women are affected by the *Zina* Ordinance is beyond the scope of this article. Recent killings of women by their middle-class families suggest that the state is unable or unwilling to provide them protection in prison or shelters that impoverished women "enjoy." See Khan 2004.

inist agendas, it is likely that many women frequently see their concerns as personal and advocate for change at an individual level. Feminist responses to women's subordination, on the other hand, Narayan points out, will also include an analysis of women's subordination as systemic and requiring collective action.

I want to identify another issue. Within conventional accounts, hierarchies between the researcher and the researched, first and third world, are frequently rendered invisible. Particularly relevant in the process of inquiry are Daphne Patai's (1991) comments that research itself depends on a subject/object split through which the objectification and exploitation of the object of research are integral to the design of the project. This danger increases, Patai warns us, "when the researcher is interviewing 'down,' that is, among those less powerful (economically, politically, socially) than the researcher herself" (1991, 137).

While interviewing the women facing *zina* charges, I was constantly reminded of inequalities between us. There was I, employed, professional, academic, physically not incarcerated like the women I interviewed, who were also unemployed and often illiterate. Not only was the interaction asymmetrical, but I was also unsure as to what our conversations meant to the women. Did they recite their stories to me willingly or because the prison officials had asked them to? Did they think I might be able to help them get released from prison? Frequently, they had anecdotes they wanted me to include in what I was writing. "I am against judges, write about that please," one woman commented. Did they think the report (as they called it) I was writing would help change their circumstances? Did they speak to me because they had found someone who appeared sympathetic and was willing to listen to their narrative of sorrow and resistance? Or was their encounter with me merely a diversion from the routine of prison life? Walking away from the prison to write my "report" in the form of another academic paper for which I would receive professional recognition, I was uneasy. Our interactions did not translate into a tangible and immediate benefit for them.

There is another aspect of this sensationalization of the third-world woman over there. As the native informant's plight is picked up in the west, women living under western patriarchy can be reminded, tacitly or openly, that they are better off than the woman whose genitals have been mutilated, or who is forced to wear the veil, or who has to face the *zina* laws. Such comparisons make it easier for women in the west to believe that they are not oppressed and make critiques of the violence and other forms of structural inequalities they face more difficult to get across. Moreover, they diminish movements toward international feminist solidarity. A

move away from the binary of first and third world allows us to examine, for example, how antiwoman practices manifest themselves in different locales. In this way we move out of the “goodness” or “badness” of the *zina* laws and toward an examination of how collaborative work can help women illuminate one another’s oppression.

As I perform the native and speak about the *zina* laws, I am inviting the viewer back to the familiar position that Islam is once again crushing women. I am therefore suspect. I am suspect to myself: Can I do ethical research? Others are also suspicious of me: Is she authentic enough? Will she betray us? Although the “good native” connotes a different person to each of these positions, they all want to know if I am going to be a good girl. This is my triple bind, and I risk alienating one or all each time I speak. How then do I resist this location? How do I produce an account of the *zina* laws that challenges orientalism and is also responsive to local conditions? I believe that I can move out of the triple bind by initiating several conversations about the native informant. One of these conversations calls for accountability and transparency. A second conversation connects local patriarchies to global ones and develops a transnational feminist analysis of the *Zina* Ordinance. In making these connections, I endorse Chandra Talpade Mohanty’s (1991) position that accounts of women’s oppression show the local and global not only as simultaneous but also as constitutive of each other. Her comments direct me to link imprisonment for *zina* with the effects of globalization and militarization, providing a way out of my dilemma. At the same time I make a case for transnational feminist solidarity.

Identifying some of the issues connected to data collection is part of my attempt at transparency. I contacted Hina Jilani, a lawyer with the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP), in this regard. Jilani, however, could not direct me to any women who had been incarcerated and were now free to speak of their experiences. Although she works with women on *zina* cases, she does not know of their whereabouts once they are released. This is because the process of incarceration, Jilani claims, is extremely destructive for the women. Some go back to their families after they are released from prison. Frequently families do not want them back, or the women are afraid of their families, as they are the ones who have caused them to be imprisoned in the first place. So many women simply disappear and make their lives anew in whatever way they can. Not having access to women who were former prisoners and who were relatively free to speak about the process without fear of repercussions left several matters unexplored. What were their experiences in the lockup and in the prison? What kinds of contact, if any, did they have with their families upon release?

Were they able to connect with and regain custody of their children? What strategies did they employ to rebuild their lives? Unfortunately, the victims disappear. Their disappearance hands the state a clean process in which there are no victims demanding restitution, just activists who can be dismissed as contaminated by the west.

Although Jilani could not connect me with former prisoners, she directed me to sites in Lahore and Karachi where I might find women I was looking for: Kot Lakpat prison in Lahore and the Karachi Central Jail, as well as shelters called *Darul-Aman* (house of peace). Using informal networks, I got permission to interview women there.

The culture of these institutions discourages private visits with women, so an institutional representative is always present. Indeed, Jilani discouraged me from speaking to a woman without an official being present, as this might have repercussions for the woman after I left. Jilani recommended that I not question women openly, even in front of the institutional official, about their experiences in and out of prison and *Darul-Aman*, particularly about their experience of violence in police custody or in the institutions in which they now found themselves. “Just to ask a[n imprisoned] woman about violence is to expose her to danger,” Jilani pointed out. “We [the HRCF] don’t know what is happening to her inside. We will leave and she will be left alone. If anyone wants to retaliate, they can do it. This is something we have always discouraged, that people should go and ask this question: Has anyone been violent with you?”⁷ So I chose to start the interviews with the question: “What events led you to this place?” Each woman could then answer with what felt safe for her. I only interjected to clarify what she had said. It is entirely possible that the women wanted to say more but did not because they did not feel safe in front of the institutional official or with me, the newcomer. However, they told their stories without hesitation and doubt, as if they had narrated these stories before.

Also, many of the women in prison suffer from depression and are unable to take greater advantage of opportunities for rehabilitation provided to them by NGOs. In 2001 I facilitated an empowerment group with fourteen women in prison for *zina*. Yes, I was again gathering data for my research, but my work also had an immediate benefit for the women. At the end of the six-month group encounter, the women stated that they felt emotionally stronger for having participated in it. Many were able to reclaim a measure of agency through participation in the legal education program made available in prison by a local NGO. Women

⁷ Interview with Hina Jilani, Lahore, Pakistan, December 1998.

supported and guided one another through the difficulties of incarceration and legal defense. Each encouraged the others to be in constant touch with their lawyers and to be aware of the particularities of their cases, including the causes for delays in their hearings.⁸ As I continue my work in Pakistan, I will demonstrate my theoretical and practical commitment to women's struggles and strengthen collaborations with activists over there.

As for the binary between here and there, maybe I cannot resolve it, but I can certainly complicate it. And I can do this through ongoing projects that demonstrate my commitment to women's struggles in Pakistan. These initiatives move me beyond data gathering and career advancement to projects with a more immediate and practical impact. My work with Lawyers for Human Rights and Legal Aid (LHRLA) in Karachi provides an example. In January 2001 I designed and facilitated four day-long workshops on violence against women and suicide prevention. Lawyers, journalists, and union members as well as women's studies faculty and students from Karachi University attended these sessions. Some of these women were veiled head to toe. Their participation in the discussions reminded me that conventional views regarding veiled women—the assumption that veiled women are opposed to feminist struggles—need to be rethought.

Linking religion, nationalism, and globalization allows me to identify the ways in which local patriarchies are interconnected to global ones. Pakistani politicians have invoked Islam as a means of mobilizing nationalist consensus, particularly for the frequent wars with India, which in turn have justified military spending. The social, political, and economic conditions that accompany such processes have recently been exacerbated, as Pervez Musharraf, the current president of Pakistan and another military dictator, energetically aligns himself with the U.S.-led war on terror. Significant segments of this war are being carried out on Pakistani territory, it is widely believed, against the wishes of large numbers of Pakistanis. The state juggles these contradictory demands and maintains a delicate balance. The repeal of the *zina* laws threatens this balance.

Toward transnational feminism

The forces of globalization are not limited to national borders, and thus the local must be examined in conjunction with the global. At the same

⁸ For a more in-depth discussion of this process, see "Towards a Politics of Transnationality: *Zina* Ordinance in Pakistan," unpublished manuscript on file with author.

time, forms of collective resistance must be formulated at an international level that addresses local issues as well. As Mohanty argues, such resistance calls for a feminism without borders, one that acknowledges the fault lines, conflicts, differences, fears, and containment that borders represent (2003, 2).

Such feminism envisions change and social-justice work across these lines of demarcation and division and allows us to understand Naheed's story. She is twenty-five years old and had been an inmate of Kot Lakpat Lahore prison for over a year when I interviewed her in December 1998.

I married my neighbor. My parents were against the marriage although my husband had come with a formal proposal and asked for my hand. My parents said they wanted one *lakh* before they gave him permission to marry me.⁹ Then my husband sold his land and was willing to give them the one *lakh* they had asked for. But they still said no. This time they said that he is Punjabi and we are Sindhis and we are of a different *biradri* [community].¹⁰ So I ran away with him and we got married anyway. My parents found us eventually and charged us with *zina* and both of us are in jail. Now they say give us the one *lakh* we asked for and then we will withdraw the charges. But the money has been spent on hiding from my parents and on lawyers. Now we have no more money. I am afraid that when we are released—that is, my son, my husband, and I—my parents will find us and kill us.

Naheed has been charged with *zina*. Her account provides an example of how the local is connected to the global. She is defined as deviant because of her uncontrolled sexuality and her attempts to resist the power of the law and the control of her family. Why did she end up in a Pakistani jail? I have shown that it is not only because of religion. Instead, her poverty and illiteracy leave her more vulnerable to new forms of tradition in circulation under the guise of religion. She is impoverished and illiterate not only because the state is spending less and less money on education and job creation but also because her femaleness is commodified within a society structured by neocolonial injustices. That is, Pakistan continues to suffer the effects of past and current forms of colonial and neocolonial exploitation, a process through which more and more women suffer the

⁹ One *lakh* is 100,000 rupees (approximately C\$2,100).

¹⁰ Sind and Punjab are two different provinces in Pakistan. Naheed's parents are conflating provincial regional groups with ethnicity, as is often done in Pakistan.

effects of poverty, violence, and increased vulnerability to state and familial control over their sexuality.

I have recommended that we understand my analysis through a process that also examines narration and its reading. Earlier in this article I identified at least three native informants who help narrate the *Zina* Ordinance and its effects: the woman who is charged with and confined for *zina*, the Pakistani activists who challenge the system and help secure her release, and myself, a Canadian academic originally from Pakistan, who is producing an account largely for a western audience. I want to identify another person in this narrative as it travels across national and class borders. She is the reader who brings to her interpretation of my account her own history of compliance and resistance to the dominant perspectives that permeate our society about women, the third world, and Islam.

Joan Scott (1992) and Joanne Passaro (1997) have cautioned against a sole reliance on narratives of experience, Scott because there are many structural relations outside the experience of the narrator, and Passaro because the women might be blamed for their choices and consequently their circumstances. Many of the women with whom I spoke had chosen to rebel against the wishes of more powerful members of their families. They blamed only their families and corrupt government officials for their plight. They had little knowledge, however, of the forces that brought General Zia to power or those that encouraged his role in the cold war conflict in Afghanistan, a role that allowed him to trample on human rights in Pakistan with little international censure. They were unaware of the role that globalization, militarism, or the war on terrorism had on their imprisonment.

I am not accusing the women charged with *zina* of false consciousness. I am merely cautioning against using their accounts alone as testimonies of oppression. If we take their accounts at face value, local patriarchies are identified as the cause of their situation. However, a change in local patriarchs, from Zia to Musharraf, despite the latter's stated good intentions, has not led to a repeal of the *Zina* Ordinance. Looking beyond the nation allows us to connect their stories to a broader trend toward continued militarization of third-world countries, including Pakistan. Such transnational feminism provides a more complex understanding of these women's plight.

I believe that by having different conversations about native informing we can challenge the politics of benevolence emerging from Euro-American societies. Indeed these reconfigured conversations about native informing allow us to understand the links between the local and the global at two levels: the conditions that exist at the local level in Pakistan and

the global context that sustains those conditions. Furthermore, this examination of my own location as native informant helps constitute the parameters of my investigation of *zina*. The forces of globalization help sustain the *zina* laws in Pakistan. These same forces also influence the movement of diverse peoples into diasporic exile in the first world. Re-configured native informing identifies common fronts for these seemingly diverse struggles. Such linking disrupts binary thinking about the oppressed third-world woman and the liberated first-world woman and allows for an understanding of how oppressions operate globally.¹¹

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¹¹ A western reader of my account might question how she is situated vis-à-vis the *Zina* Ordinance. For example, does she appreciate what international policies her local politicians support? Does she know where her tax dollars are spent? Does she challenge the constant barrage of anti-Islam and anti-third-world commentary emerging from the media and from everyday conversations? Making transnational links and working with other feminists (first and third world) can lead her toward solidarity struggles for transformative change, locally and internationally. These efforts can contribute to a redefined feminist standpoint that does not privilege women as a group or identify native informing as a view from nowhere. Instead, native informing becomes a process very much grounded in historical, political, and social relations.

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