

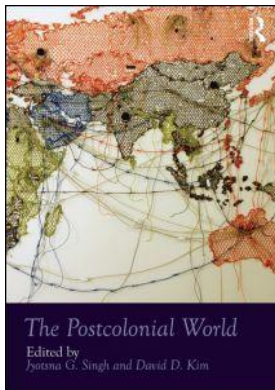
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## **The Postcolonial World**

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### **Morality and Desire**

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## CHAPTER SIX

### MORALITY AND DESIRE

#### The role of the “Westernized” woman in post-independence Pakistani cinema



*Sadaf Ahmad*

Jameel, played by actor Waheed Murad and one of the male protagonists of the 1975 hit *Mohabbat Zindagee Hai* [*Love Is Life*], sings of his leaving Eastern ways and adopting Western ones as he sings *mashraqi rang ko chor kai, maghrabi rang apna liya*.<sup>1</sup> He is concerned with his fiancée’s turn to a *maghrabi* or “Western”<sup>2</sup> lifestyle and this song is a part of his larger mission to cure her of her alleged wayward ways so that she may embody desirable “Eastern” virtues once again.

The *maghrabzada* or Westernized woman – a Pakistani woman who embodies Western values and characteristics – has manifested herself through different kinds of characters in Pakistani films since the nation’s creation in 1947. The vamp and cabaret dancer are her earliest incarnations and can be seen in films in the postcolonial era as early as the 1950s. The *maghrabzada* women in Pakistani films produced in the 1970s, however, were not the vamps and cabaret dancers of the prior decades. While they shared some similarity in terms of looks, values, and behavior, they were demonized in a way that they were not earlier and they came to embody and represent immorality and were portrayed as a threat to the family and to social order.

I suggest that the trope of the *maghrabzada* woman in Pakistani films of the 1970s intersects with the presence of a similar and an increasingly ubiquitous trope of the Western woman in public consciousness in that time period, one which came into being as a result of a historical process that has its roots in colonial India. Maulana Sayyid Abu’l Ala Mawdudi (1903–1979), a religious reformer and founder of the *Jama’at-i-Islami*, developed this trope in Northern India in the early twentieth century, when the Indian subcontinent was still under British colonial rule.<sup>3</sup> His Occidental discourse of the West and Western women and the essentialist images that he produced came into being through the colonial encounter and originally aimed to provide Muslims with an Other that could be used to illustrate what was wrong with the West, and to inform Muslims (and especially Muslim women) of how they ought to behave in contrast.

However, once made, representations can be challenged, altered, or be used for entirely different purposes. Thus on the one hand, the filmmakers of the 1970s also drew upon essentialized images of the West and *maghrabzada* women, which had become ubiquitous in public by that time, for the same purpose, namely, to illustrate

the dangers that befell those who adopted Western, a.k.a. “immoral” values and lifestyle. They evoked associations between similar negative images of supposedly decadent Westernized women produced by Mawdudi earlier. But this was not the only reason these images were deployed by filmmakers. Homi Bhaba has spoken of the Other being “at once an object of desire and derision” in colonial discourse and it is tempting to read something similar in the Occidental discourse, as the Other looks back.<sup>4</sup> Such derision is necessary to protect one’s culture and tradition. At the same time, the moral discourse can be perceived as a cover that hides the fascination, the desire for the other. Pakistani filmmakers were interested in providing their audience with drama and entertainment and the *maghrabzada* woman, who was vivacious and exciting, was used to provide this entertainment and satisfy the male gaze even as she was derided for doing so.

Nevertheless, while it is tempting to view the *maghrabzada* woman as an object of both desire and derision because of her status in terms of alterity and otherness, a closer look at the manner in which female protagonists have been represented in the 1980s and beyond strongly suggests that the audience’s potential desire for a *maghrabzada* woman has less to do with her being *maghrabzada* and more to do with her being able to embody an overt sexuality, which she could do so because of her status as a Westernized other. However, this embodiment did not remain her sole domain in the 1980s and, quite strikingly, we soon begin seeing her character disappear from films.

I use this chapter to examine the *maghrabzada* woman’s *changing* depiction in Pakistani cinema and argue that colonialism’s legacy, tied to the very existence of the nation itself and responsible for many contemporary social structures and aspects of both material and non-material culture, is neither comprehensive nor absolute. In this context, the images of the stereotypical Western Other that were forged in a colonial context had a limited utility in postcolonial Pakistani cinema – a cinema that cannot strictly be framed as “postcolonial” in any unequivocal sense. While appropriate as a temporal category, its use as a primary framework or lens through which to understand the nature of Pakistani cinema in general, or the *maghrabzada* woman in specific, hides more than it reveals. Therefore, in my approach I move beyond a colonial/postcolonial binary and instead examine the *maghrabzada* woman through more complex discursive genealogies and influences, which may have little to nothing to do with the initial colonial encounter, even when the depiction itself may be initially rooted within it.

In order to unpack the points mentioned above, I begin this chapter by providing a brief overview of how Maulana Mawdudi’s concern for the Muslim predicament in colonial India eventually led to his generating a reified image of an immoral West; in doing so, I wish to illustrate the manner in which he repeatedly used this imagery to highlight the dangers of upholding allegedly Western values. I then underline the similarities in how both he and the Pakistani films produced in the 1970s conceived the *maghrabzada* woman – as a shameless, immoral person who could destroy families and create havoc in society – and used her as a pedagogical device. Thus in the subsequent section, I suggest that this character’s conception and presence in films of the 1970s is directly related to the *Jama‘at-i-Islami*’s success in popularizing Mawdudi’s discourse within society by that time, and that the discourse that was forged through a colonial encounter continued to be invoked to serve a patriarchal

agenda – an agenda that revolved around controlling women’s independence and sexuality, while simultaneously presenting them as objects of desire. However, I conclude this chapter by drawing upon the changes the film industry went through and this character’s subsequent disappearance in films, revealing in turn the limits of a post-colonial analytical lens, especially as offering a temporal perspective. I suggest that a holistic analysis that pays attention to temporal changes and multiple influences across a range of social domains, and recognizes the varying impact a discourse can have across different social sectors, leads to a more complex and nuanced understanding of the active forces within the society of the subcontinent.

## MAULANA MAWDUDI AND WESTERN WOMEN

Partha Chatterjee argues that Bengali literature (mainly by Hindu authors) was rife with “gross caricatures” of European influenced Bengali women in the nineteenth century, when the Indian subcontinent was under British colonial rule.<sup>5</sup> These highly mocked images of the so-called Westernized women had little basis in reality, but were creations that attempted to discourage women from taking up alien behaviors. The Muslims in Northern India, however, were more diverse in terms of how they viewed European women as they carried out their respective reform movements. Barbara Metcalf puts these reform movements in three categories – the *ulema* or religious scholars, the social reformers, and the Islamists.<sup>6</sup>

The *ulema* of the late nineteenth century, such as Maulana Ashraf Ali Thanawi, were interested in “secur[ing] a better moral and material life for women and their families” and they wrote about the importance of women’s literacy, their religious knowledge, and their ability to carry out a range of responsibilities in their religious writings.<sup>7</sup> This discourse, however, developed “largely independent of any engagement with European critiques of Indian women and they did not define themselves by either emulating or opposing a European pattern.”<sup>8</sup> European women were completely ignored in this discourse. The social reformers, such as Sayyid Mumtaz Ali and Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain, were also interested in female education and securing greater rights for Muslim women. However, unlike the *ulema*, they idealized European women’s educated status and also focused on issues such as polygamy and purdah. This often resulted in their being called “colonial collaborators” and they were accused of internalizing Orientalist understandings of Indian women’s situation.<sup>9</sup> Metcalf’s Islamists were at the other end of the spectrum in this regard and their work demonized European women. Maulana Mawdudi, the most successful Islamic reformer within this category, expanded upon “the horrors that followed upon the freedom of Western women” and critiqued the “‘Oriental Occidentals’ who mimicked and parroted the West without knowing the implications of what they were doing” in his writings in the 1930s.<sup>10</sup>

Mawdudi forged his ideas during a period of colonial rule when the Muslims in the Indian subcontinent were fighting to get rid of the British while simultaneously struggling against the idea of Hindu dominance in an increasingly communal atmosphere of colonial India. He eventually came to the conclusion that an Islamic revival was the only answer to the Muslim predicament. It was for both this and “for Muslims to mobilize their resources to confront the Hindu challenge . . . [that he believed that] they had to free their souls from Western influence.”<sup>11</sup> The Western Other, both

as a distinct civilization and as a people, was constantly used to educate Muslims about what they must denounce, what they must overcome. Thus “Mawdudi’s vision was a product of a discourse with the ‘other,’ the West” and largely revolved around denouncing this other and the values associated with it.<sup>12</sup>

The drive to bring about an Islamic revival among the Muslims and strengthen them as a community eventually led Mawdudi to create the *Jama‘at-i-Islami*, the most prominent religio-political party in Pakistan today, in 1941, six years before the partition of the Indian subcontinent into India and Pakistan. He was the head of the party for thirty years and played a critical role in giving it its current structure and infusing it with an Islamic ideology he developed over the years. His discourse about women is captured in his 1939 publication titled “Purdah and the Status of Women.”<sup>13</sup> While his book was addressed to his Oriental Occidentals, both men and women, and aimed to illustrate the dangers and the moral and social decay that would befall them if they continued to follow Western culture and ideals, his emphasis was on women’s behavior, both Western and Muslim.

Women often come to represent contesting differences between groups. Questions of morality hinge upon the behaviors of women rather than men, and are used in . . . discourses aimed at creating an unacceptable and alien “other”, made more “other” by the imagined complete otherness of their women folk.<sup>14</sup>

Mawdudi thus used a significant portion of his text to lay out his theory of how the industrial revolution, the idea of individual freedom and capitalism, facilitated women’s economic independence, gender equality, and a free interaction between the sexes, conditions which he believed caused the West’s moral bankruptcy. It is in this context that he, for instance, frequently claimed that interactions between the sexes resulted in “free sexual indulgence and licentiousness [that] has disrupted the family system” in different European countries.<sup>15</sup> Women’s active presence in the public sphere and their interaction with men is thus linked with moral decay and, equally importantly, a reduced interest in fulfilling one’s responsibilities as a wife and a mother, both of which are perceived to be the bedrock of a stable home and ultimately a stable society, “upon which depends the very existence of [the] human race and civilization.”<sup>16</sup> Mawdudi’s concern with regulating female behavior and sexuality was thus directly connected to his concern with social stability. He did not limit his critique to the Muslim women whom he believed followed Western ways of being, but also critiqued the male Oriental Occidentals for the role he believed they played in encouraging their female family members to follow Western values and behaviors in the name of emancipation.

Mawdudi and the *Jama‘at-i-Islami* upheld the idea of a global Muslim ummah or community. They were therefore against nationalism and did not support the idea of Pakistan as a separate nation-state in the lead up to its creation. It took them some time to regroup and regain their credibility after Independence in 1947. However, they gained significant popularity by the 1970s due to a combination of reasons: developing an effective nationwide organizational structure, increased revenues from the sale of their religious literature from the 1950s, gaining substantial financial support from propertied elite as well as rich Gulf states, aggressive religious outreach – through neighborhood religious study groups, their student wing the *Jami‘at-i-Tulabah*, and

through various affiliate organizations such as the Pakistan Medical Association, etc. who proselytized on their behalf – inroads into institutions like the bureaucracy, support from the lower middle class who were put off by the “moral laxity” of the 1960s and 1970s, etc.<sup>17</sup> The *Jama‘at-i-Islami*’s diligent efforts to proselytize in a very systematic and strategic manner meant that Mawdudi’s Occidental discourse about the decadent West and the sexualized Western and Westernized woman, who created *fitna* or chaos within society and undermined the institution of the family, spread within society and began informing public consciousness within a few decades of partition. It is in this context that we see similar ideas, which are even articulated in a similar manner, gradually make their way into Pakistani films through filmmakers’ representations of these women.

There is a remarkable parallel between Mawdudi’s essentialist discourse about the West, Western women, and the Oriental Occidentals, and the discourse about them in Pakistani films. Both present a reified picture of the West, which they identify with moral decadence, and highlight the role of clubs and the behaviors associated with it – e.g. dancing, drinking – with a sexual inflection and sexual perversions. Women are criticized for engaging in these immoral activities and attempting to attract men through an increasing degree of nudity and shamelessness, as are the men who encourage women to behave thusly. Both demonize women’s independence and justify their position by displaying a strong concern for the stability of the home and of society. The next section highlights these parallels in order to underline this interplay of similarities and echoes, even though the two mediums – political/religious writings and popular film – differ so radically.

### THE MAGHRABZADA WOMAN IN PAKISTANI FILMS

Cabaret dancers were the earliest manifestation of the Western woman in Pakistani films. Rakshi was a well-known dancer who often did cabarets in films, for instance, in the 1956 hit *Intezaar* [*The Wait*] in which she sings and dances to the catchy “*jawani ki ratein, jawani ke din*” [*Nights and Days of Youth*]. Zamurad’s cabaret to the song “*kaisa jadugar dilbar*” [*My Magician Beloved*] in Hasan Tariq’s *Tehzeeb* [*Tradition*] (1971) is another well-known number. Wearing flounced skirts, sequined maxis, and dancing to the accompaniment of non-South Asian musical instruments like the saxophone, trumpet, bass, and drums in venues like clubs or hotel lounges, the cabaret dancers were clear symbols of the West; as were the many vamps who played the role of the seductress, such as Husna in *Dilruba* [*Beloved*] (1975).

These early Pakistani films were made in a social environment in which cabarets used to take place in clubs and hotels in the larger cities like Karachi and Lahore. Inspired by the cabarets in Western countries in general and in Iran and Afghanistan in specific, they made their way into Pakistan in the late 1950s.<sup>18</sup> The West and Western culture did not have negative connotations at that time. Film analyst and critic, Dr. Omer Adil,<sup>19</sup> expands upon this idea as he sketches the atmosphere in the larger urban cities in the 1950s and 1960s:

The West was equated with positivity. . . . It was a very different environment then. We would have bars, could go and buy whisky anywhere. . . . The old gymkhana had a dance floor. Women would dance in saris, men had to wear dinner



jackets. Actress Manorma's Irish mother, Mrs. Daniels, had a dancing school in Lakshmi *chowk* [in Lahore] where she taught Western ballroom dancing to anyone who wanted to learn.

The character of the cabaret dancer clearly embodied a foreign Western culture but these characters were not demonized for this. It was only with time, particularly in the 1970s, that the West began to acquire negative connotations in commercial films and *different* permutations of the Westernized woman developed to depict waywardness. These changes occurred in conjunction with Mawdudi's and the *Jama'at-i-Islami's* increasing popularity in society.

Omer Adil divides *maghrabzada* Pakistani female characters into four different categories. These include the club dancer and the vamp; the *maghrabzada* woman with the heart of gold, as seen in Sabiha Khanum's Anglo-Indian brothel-running character "Mummy" in *Ek Gunah Aur Sahib* [*One More Sin*] (1975); the second wife or the main protagonist's stepmother; and the female protagonist who becomes *maghrabzada* and requires the hero's intervention to recover. I add a fifth category to this classification, that of the main female protagonist or supporting actress who is either brought up in the West or who becomes Westernized as an adult in Pakistan and who, unlike the women in the fourth category, receive no redemption.

This paper focuses on the characters in the last three categories mentioned above – the second wife, the Westernized female protagonist who is redeemed by the hero, and the woman who is either brought up Western or becomes so, and who is beyond redemption. My study of popular Pakistani films – films that became part of Pakistan's silver, golden, platinum, or diamond jubilee lists, each category marking it to have run for at least twenty-five, fifty, seventy-five, or one hundred weeks in Pakistani cinemas respectively – indicates that the characters in *these three categories were not limited to but certainly made their most frequent appearance in the 1970s*. Their characteristics were similar across films and can therefore be used to build a caricature and/or a prototype of a *maghrabzada* woman who, through her values and her behavior, threatens the existence of society itself. She is therefore either redeemed or, more frequently, punished. The latter becomes a particularly effective way of sending out a moralistic message of the hegemonic gendered expectations society has from "good" women<sup>20</sup> and the dangers that would befall them if they were to violate these expectations.

Filmmakers have often used language and appearance to tag a woman as *maghrabzada*. Both are common ways of reading people's identities along a range of axes and filmmakers have used them as signs of people's values and lifestyle, Eastern and Western, in this context. What was articulated by Mawdudi in prose, and what had begun informing public consciousness, is brought to life in these characters – in the "flesh and blood" of cinema. It is because these ideas and images are based on what have become popular caricatures in society that they serve as an instant shortcut into understanding the behavior, social norms, and worldview of this caricatured group, leading to an immediate comprehension through the prior associations they invoke.

A number of Pakistani filmmakers have therefore interwoven English words in the characters' dialogues in order to make them come across as either modern or Western.<sup>21</sup> A change in the same character's speech, from pure Urdu to Urdu interspersed with English words, thus becomes an outward manifestation of an internal change.

We see this clearly in *Tehzeeb*, in which film actress Rani is shown as a simple, uneducated young woman who marries a rich and “modern” man who clearly exemplifies Mawdudi’s male Oriental Occidental. It is because of such men, Mawdudi claims, that

. . . wives, sisters and daughters in full make-up, are brought face to face with friends . . . and are encouraged to mix freely and have good time with them in a manner and to an extent unimaginable for a Muslim lady even in company of her real brother.<sup>22</sup>

A remarkable parallel can be seen between such men and Rani’s husband who insists on making her equally modern by teaching her English, and who changes her wardrobe, shows her how to dance, and encourages her to drink alcohol and interact with men at his club. All of these characteristics have become standard identity markers of *maghrabzada* people over time. Thus the change in the way Rani greets her husband’s paternal grandmother – her initial “*salaam dadi*” [*salaam* is a Muslim greeting that means “blessings be upon you” and *dadi* is a term for a paternal grandmother] is replaced with a “Hel-lo Grandma” – is not just a painfully amusing illustration of her transformation but is one that is clearly intended to highlight and underline the nature of that transformation – one that has led her away from the East and brought her closer to the West and everything that it popularly represents. Blonde or brunette wigs, Western attire, and the English language are popular markers of the immoral West in these films and provide the audience with instant cues to position these characters with reference to their values, or rather lack thereof (see Figure 6.1 on page 129).

This *maghrabzada* woman is often juxtaposed with the good *mashraqi* or Eastern woman who displays an opposing set of characteristics and values. Fari and Roohi, played by actresses Babra Sharif and Zeba respectively, are sisters in Shebab Keranvi’s film *Nauker [Servant]* (1975), and their characters are used to exemplify these Western and Eastern values respectively. Fari exemplifies the demonized Western woman, who wears Western clothes, takes pride in being the life of a club where she dances with men, and enjoys an active social life. Her stepfather frequently criticizes her behavior, for instance, telling her mother that “Eastern daughters do not become the life of modern society,” on one occasion. Fari is also frequently rude and inconsiderate, disrespectful towards her elders, engages in lying, and puts her pleasure and her needs above her family’s repute. Her sister, in stark contrast, embodies what are popularly touted as Eastern virtues; she only goes out to study or to frequent religious gatherings, only wears Eastern clothes, invokes the name of God before beginning a new activity, and is charitable and polite. Most importantly, she puts her family’s needs and reputation before her personal desires, as captured in her immediate willingness to give up the man she loves when her father decides that he should marry the other sister. In her words, “I consider my father’s decision to be the final decision.”

*Dosti [Friendship]* (1971) also exemplifies both Eastern and Western caricatures. Actress Shabnam depicts the former in her role of a simple, innocent village girl while Husna plays the role of a young woman, called Baby, who is born of a Pakistani father and an English mother and was brought up in England. The film repeatedly compares the two characters to demonstrate the problems that arise when children grow up in a Western atmosphere, and have Western mothers who are unable to



transmit Eastern values and culture to their children. Baby's father often laments the mistake he made when he married an English woman. "I married an Englishwoman because of the passions of my youth," he mourns. "I forgot that she would become the mother of my children one day."

Western mothers (e.g. in *Playboy* [1978] and *Dosti*) and Westernized mothers (e.g. in *Nauker*, *Mohabbat Zindagee Hai*, *Kora Kaghaz* [Blank Page, 1978] etc.) are all held responsible (through no fault of their own in the case of the Western mothers) for failing to transmit important Eastern values and ideas – obedience, respect, morality, family – into the next generation; in other words, for failing to carry out their most basic responsibility in the gendered worldview of these films that is based on a strict gender division of labor. *Maghrabzada* mothers are portrayed as bad mothers as they see nothing wrong in their daughters adopting Western behaviors and values, and because they are oblivious to the personal and social consequences of such behavior. As such, they are shown to encourage their daughters to frequent clubs, dance with the men there, have boyfriends, and be independent.

It is this last characteristic – independence, or rather independence that can lead to sexual autonomy – that is often demonized for what it represents, a threat to the institution of marriage and by extension social stability itself. Mawdudi has frequently associated unregulated sexuality with social instability. He tells us that:

The family system can neither be established nor can it work in a country where men and women have completely lost sight of marriage and its purpose, where sexual relation is aimed at gratifying sexual urge only. . . . In an environment such as this, the people are soon deprived of their capabilities to shoulder responsibility of matrimony, its obligations and rights, and sustain the moral discipline that it brings.<sup>23</sup>

There is a long history of women being perceived as a source of social disorder both within and outside the Islamic tradition.<sup>24</sup> Women and their bodies are made responsible for a man's inability to control himself and their unregulated sexuality is believed to carry the potential for creating *fitna* within society. Thus the Islamic tradition that was "formulated in legal thought and guarded by scholars from the earliest centuries of Islam, focused . . . on control of their [women's] sexuality" through veiling and/or seclusion, regulating their contact with men, etc.<sup>25</sup> And although these are common themes within the Islamic tradition, Mawdudi was one of the first Islamic reformers in South Asia who, because of his resistance to the colonial influence in producing Western identities for women, constructed the image of the Western woman as an embodiment of unregulated sexuality who would serve as an example of how such behavior could create havoc in society.

Thus independent women are usually depicted as immoral in these films. Going to clubs is one of their standard behaviors. Mawdudi made repeated references to newspaper articles and other pieces of Western writing to depict the West as a den of iniquity and wickedness. He has, for instance, claimed that "almost all ballrooms, night clubs, beauty parlours, manicure shops, massage hairdressing shops in America have turned into houses of prostitution."<sup>26</sup> The clubs in these films are often as Mawdudi imagined them, i.e. as spaces where all kinds of perversions, sexual and otherwise, take place. Going to these spaces, having boyfriends, and dancing with men are

all common ways in which women's independence is depicted and the audience is repeatedly reminded of the immorality such independence leads to.

These are the women whose unchecked sexuality gives them the label of “bad women,” women who can be a source of temporary pleasure and the object of male desire, but whose behavior makes them an inappropriate marriage partner in a patrilineal system in which ensuring paternity is a high priority and requires a control of their sexuality.<sup>27</sup> Their alleged immoral behavior, especially their interaction with men in places like clubs, automatically makes others question their character and lead to their lesser value in the marriage mart. Tony, the male protagonist in *Playboy* and who enacts all the behaviors associated with one, does not consider Momi (who is a watered down version of his own character) as a potential marriage partner because she is “shameless and immoral, ready to fall into everyone's lap.”

All the female characters mentioned thus far reproduce an essentialist understanding of what the West represents. The West's association with an uncontrolled sexuality repeatedly comes out as one of the most important differences between it and an Eastern culture. Momi's father (*Playboy*) married an English woman and gives her his example to highlight this point as he discourages her from her *maghribzada* ways:

look at me if you want to learn a lesson. I left my roots and adopted this [Western] culture. I got lost in fleshly desires and drink. I lost my identity. And it was too late by the time I came to my senses. This culture turns humans into animals.

Similarly, a conversation between Baby and the main male protagonist in *Dosti* also highlights this theme. The conversation begins when he makes a disdainful comment about the dancing throngs in a club in London and ends with his claiming that the women there “will try anything to attract men. They display all their body parts, bare their skin. . . . That day is not far when fashionable women will roam around naked in market places in order to gain men's attention.” This last comment is immediately followed by a brief and completely random clip of English men and women in bathing suits on a beach. It is striking that such representations of the West and the values and behaviors that are associated with it are identical to Mawdudi's conception. He made these associations decades earlier when he said that:

The free intermingling of the sexes has brought in its wake an ever-growing tendency towards showing off, nudeness and sex perversion. . . . In the absence of any moral restraint . . . both the sexes begin to show off and display their physical charms without any consideration for decency. This tendency ultimately culminates in nudity. And this is what is happening in the Western civilization today. To develop a magnetic attraction for man has become a mania with the woman there. When, however, she cannot satisfy this mania in spite of bright and dazzling dresses, seductive cosmetics . . . the poor disgusted soul jumps out of her clothes.<sup>28</sup>

Western culture and values are clearly linked with moral decadence and animal-like behavior in both Mawdudi's discourse and in Pakistani films of the 1970s. These

associations are juxtaposed with the East and Eastern values, as is seen in Mawdudi's critique of the Oriental Occidentals, who he argued believed that:

material gains and sensual pleasures are of real worth, whereas the sense of honour, chastity, moral purity, matrimonial loyalty, undefiled lineage, and the like virtues are not only worthless but antiquated whims which must be destroyed for the sake of making progress. These people are indeed true followers of the Western creed. They are now trying their utmost to spread and propagate it in the Eastern countries.<sup>29</sup>

Discourse such as this, which is subsequently found in Pakistani films, creates and reproduces an opposing, mutually exclusive binary dualism between the Self and Other, whereby the Other is continuously referred to as a source of social destruction. Irfan, Farzana's brother<sup>30</sup> and the main male protagonist in *Mohabbat Zindagee Hai*, draws upon this essentialist dualism when he argues with his stepmother over her allowing Farzana to go to a club. "The storm that is this Western culture will blow away all the happiness in this home." The characters in these films display a lot of concern with the increasing presence of this Western culture in their society and it is frequently referred to as a poison (*Mohabbat Zindagee Hai*), a cesspool of sin (*Tehzeeb*), etc.

There is a fear that getting lost in fulfilling one's selfish desires will destroy the family, create social chaos, and threaten the very existence of Eastern society. This fear has meant that women who embody Western values and behaviors cannot be allowed to get away with it and are often, unless they are redeemed through the efforts of a morally upright male, severely punished. Thus some of these women, like Farzana, see the error of their ways through the hero's intervention and are allowed a happily-ever-after. Farzana's mother and Fari's mother also see the error of their ways when they realize how their valorization of Western values and their Western style of mothering, which allowed their daughters limitless freedoms, eventually harmed their daughters. Other female characters, however, are turned into an example of what happens to those who violate the normative behavioral expectations of society. Pakistani filmmakers have utilized the trope of the *maghrabzada* woman and placed her within narratives which depict her meeting a terrible end in order to underline the importance of and propagate hegemonic gendered expectations that are grounded upon women's constrained and controlled sexuality.

Following this punitive impulse, rape is a common tool to punish *maghrabzada* women in Pakistani films. Fari is raped by her male friend in *Nauker*, Momi is gang raped in a club in *Playboy*, and Rani's character is raped by her husband's friend in *Tehzeeb*. This is a very serious punishment, not just because of the violation it entails but also because a woman's sexual violation is linked with a loss of her and her family's *izzat* or honor and may have far-reaching consequences that include but are not limited to stigma, social ostracism, ridicule, not getting marriage proposals, etc. Rape is often deemed a fate worse than death due to these reasons. And once raped, these characters have to die for redemption; redemption for their prior lifestyle and for the rape itself, which has left them sexually impure and dishonored. Fari and Rani's character commit suicide, and Momi dies of her post-rape injuries. Baby does not get raped in *Dosti* but she does die in a car accident. These women's punishment via rape is a clear example of victim blaming, where women pay the price for behaving

in a socially disapproved manner. Furthermore, the ubiquitousness of their uniform fate normalizes violence as an acceptable response to their disrupting hegemonic gendered expectations associated with “good” women while simultaneously providing insights into social anxieties.

Although depicted in Pakistani films both before and after the 1970s, the *maghrabzada* women described above made their most frequent presence in this decade. I have highlighted the *Jama‘at-i-Islami’s* activities since partition to suggest that their increasing popularity encouraged these representations and their higher frequency in Pakistani films in this time period. Filmmakers are likely to have drawn upon a discourse that had become widespread by that time. But I now examine the larger socio-historical context and the film industry’s subsequent evolution within it to question how much the *maghrabzada* woman’s usefulness as an object of moral derision was complicated by the film industry’s imperative for sexual titillation of its audiences.

### HISTORICAL EVOLUTION OF THE MAGHRABZADA WOMAN – FROM THE 1970S TO THE PRESENT

The films mentioned above construct a reified image of an immoral West and this imagery is repeatedly drawn upon through the *maghrabzada* woman’s character in order to label and demonize such values and behaviors. A few of the filmmakers, for instance the Keranvi brothers (who made films like *Nauker*), genuinely believed in this discourse and used their films to send out moralistic messages. Yet it is important to note that other filmmakers wanted their films to have drama and do well at the box office and many of them began increasing the sensationalist content of their films from the late 1960s to make their films more entertaining. These filmmakers’ desire to provide greater entertainment was connected to their attempt to overcome a range of challenges and setbacks during this time period. Competition from the VCR and pirated films, and the loss of an Urdu language film market when East Pakistan – a substantial source of revenue – became Bangladesh in 1971, are some key examples of these challenges.<sup>31</sup>

An examination of the challenges the Pakistani film industry faced during this time period and the manner in which many filmmakers responded to these offers a different perspective on the reasons for the *maghrabzada* woman’s increased presence in Pakistani films during this time. Drawing upon and bringing in imagery about the decadent West and the *maghrabzada* woman gave filmmakers a legitimate excuse to add some *masala* or spice in the film, hence increasing its entertainment value. This character could provide a kind of entertainment that the good Eastern woman, who displayed an opposing set of characteristics, could not provide. The good woman could only be allowed to dance demurely. The *maghrabzada* woman and the other dancers shown in the club had no such inhibitions. The original aim of these representations, that of providing Muslims with an Other that could be used to illustrate what was wrong with the West, and to encourage them to transform into “pious” individuals so that they could avoid their fate – that of moral bankruptcy – and establish a superior culture, therefore gets turned on its head.

Mawdudi and his followers used his Occidental representations of the West and Western/ized women as a pedagogic device that aimed to regulate women’s sexuality in order to reproduce a patrilineal and patriarchal social order. Filmmakers’ precise re-creation of his worldview in order to entertain, allure, and even titillate audiences

becomes highly ironic, especially given his view that “obscenity and licentiousness is in fact . . . caused by widespread literature, pictures, cinema, theatre, dancing, and nude and immoral public performances.”<sup>32</sup> The opposition between the East and West has clearly been put to multiple, and often contradictory, uses.<sup>33</sup> The demonized (oft blonde haired) *maghrabzada* woman represents a Western woman who posed the threat articulated by Mawdudi, and yet at the same time, is transformed into an object of desire for the local male gaze that is seeking gratuitous entertainment through increasingly sensationalist films. This is true even as these representations are simultaneously used to valorize Eastern women who are shown to be the former’s superior through their “sexual purity” and their gendered appropriate behavior, which makes them both the symbol and practical caretaker of the sanctity of the home and subsequently the sanctity of the nation.

I began this paper by referring to Homi Bhaba’s idea of the Other being an object of desire and derision in colonial discourse and suggested that it could be flipped, whereby the Other, it can be argued, looks back in a similar manner. The filmmakers who put the *maghrabzada* woman’s character in their films use these characters to entertain a male audience even as they punish and judge these characters for their behavior. In this double perspective Mawdudi’s vision is brought to light, but the pedagogical lessons to be derived could be sexually inflected by images on the screen. There is a disavowal here, in which “a powerful fascination or desire is both indulged and at the same time denied.”<sup>34</sup> “The disavowal . . . allows the illicit desire to operate.”<sup>35</sup> However, this character’s subsequent demise and other changes in the Pakistani film industry in the 1980s leads me to argue that even though the *maghrabzada* woman was an object of desire up until this point in time, the desire was not for the other but was rather tied to her being a woman who could, because of her status as the other, manifest an overt sexuality to satisfy the male gaze. As an aside, it is also interesting to think of various parallels between the *maghrabzada* woman of the 1970s Pakistani cinema and the sexualized heroines of Western Film Noir movies, also portrayed in terms of their dark and dangerous sexuality.<sup>36</sup>

The celluloid *maghrabzada* woman of the 1970s slowly disappeared from films over time. An increased circulation of global images meant that it became increasingly acceptable for main female protagonists to dress in Western clothes, etc.<sup>37</sup> These were now portrayed as a marker of global modernity, with its commodification of women’s glamor and sexuality, and were stripped of their prior meaning. The *maghrabzada* woman’s character lost a bit of its punch when her attire lost the negative connotations attached to it. More importantly, regional cinema began providing far more graphic entertainment.<sup>38</sup> Pushto language films in particular have become known for their “liberal sprinkling of ‘vulgarity’ . . . titillating dance sequences pushed past the censors.”<sup>39</sup> The main female protagonist’s repertoire in Punjabi language and even in Urdu language films began including provocative song and dance numbers. These changes fit the larger context of the film industry’s decline and the filmmakers’ interest in producing quick, cheaply made productions that were high on gratuitous entertainment in an attempt to hold onto their audience.

There is no reason to suggest that the audience that found pleasure in and were entertained watching the *maghrabzada* woman in the Pakistani films of the 1970s were entertained any less in the subsequent decades. If anything, the *maghrabzada* women come across as rather tame in comparison to the female characters’ overt and



graphic displays of sexuality in the 1980s and beyond. The Punjabi song “*nairay aa*” [Come Closer], for instance, is a rain dance sequence in the super hit Punjabi film *Choorian* [Bangles] (1998) and is an excellent example of this display. It is filmed with supporting actress Nargis, who attempts to seduce the male protagonist, played by actor Moammer Rana, by dancing provocatively, her rain drenched traditional rural clothes plastered to her body. The anti-West discourse faded with the *maghrabzada* woman, who became redundant in the face of these new heroines who seduced and entertained in both rural and urban contexts, and did so without being framed as or understood as *maghrabzada*.<sup>40</sup> The fact that the *maghrabzada* woman was easily replaced by other kinds of female characters as objects of desire suggests that it was her ability to manifest an overt sexuality, rather than her foreignness, that was the draw.



Figure 6.1 Rani in the film *Tehzeeb*.

Source and Permission: Poster, Omar Ali Khan's private collection.



While the cultural dissemination of these Occidental sexual beings encapsulated in the character of the *maghrabzada* women reduced significantly in films over time, these tropes remain alive in the public consciousness. The term continues to have the same meaning attached to it – that of an immoral woman who will destroy families and create havoc in society if she is allowed to have her way – and it is often strategically utilized in an attempt to “otherize” and delegitimize Pakistani women. Lines are drawn between societies as well as within societies through modes of differentiation, which often serve a political agenda that is catered towards maintaining the status quo. Drawing upon the Occidental discourse and calling women *maghrabzada* has become a popular way to discredit them and simultaneously establish one’s own authenticity and authority in a political sphere. Pakistani senators and parliamentarians who belong to religious political parties, for instance, often use this as a strategy to discredit women’s NGOs and/or women parliamentarians when they ask for women friendly legislation or make other demands to expand their roles and increase their rights. The continued existence of these images in public consciousness and their strategic deployment underlines the longevity and the power of a discourse that was forged in response to the colonial encounter and which aims to control women and their sexuality in postcolonial and Islamist contexts. It is the association with the foreign, the “not-Us,” the inauthentic, that gives those deploying this discourse the power to denounce others. Those on the receiving end of this discourse in this post-colonial nation state, thus, still find themselves affected by this contemporary version of the earlier colonial encounter. Battling a discourse that draws its power from its entanglement with the colonial/imperial Other and that has been kept alive to this day takes a lot of effort and energy.

The *maghrabzada* woman served as a temporary object of desire as a woman within the Pakistani film industry but she is frequently invoked and continues to serve a patriarchal agenda that revolves around controlling women’s sexuality and independence to reproduce a particular kind of social order. The longevity of these images’ deployment in postcolonial Pakistan is explained by their very specific function in this context and highlights the agenda of those who continue to uphold and reproduce these essentialist categories. At the same time, an examination of these images in Pakistani cinema highlights the limits of the colonial legacy even when the images that are being examined have roots in the colonial encounter. Shifting one’s perspective reveals that desire, or rather objectification, does not discriminate in this context and trumps all boundaries. Patriarchal interests get served in both cases.

## ENDNOTES

1. This line from a song in the film *Mohabbat Zindagee Hai* is loosely translated as “I have left Eastern ways and taken up Western ones.” *Mohabbat Zindagee Hai*, 1975, Director: Iqbal Akhter, Producer: Begum Riaz Bukhari.
2. The term Western and its numerous variants are popularly associated with a lack of morality and “family values” in Pakistani public consciousness. I have put the term in quotation marks the first time I have used it to highlight my recognition of its constructedness. However, I forgo the quotation marks in the remainder of the paper with the understanding that the readers will recognize that its (and its variants) usage is situated in a particular local discourse that understands these in a stereotypical and essentialist manner. The term Eastern (and its variants) are dealt with in a similar manner.

3. See Seyyed Vali R. Nasr, *The Vanguard of the Islamic Revolution: The Jama'at-i-Islami of Pakistan* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1994), for a seminal account of Maulana Mawdudi's life and the *Jama'at-i-Islami's* development.
4. Homi K. Bhabha, "The Other Question: The Stereotype and Colonial Discourse." In *The Sexual Subject: A Screen Reader in Sexuality*, ed. Mandy Merck (London: Routledge, 1992), 313.
5. Partha Chatterjee, "The Nationalist Resolution of the Women's Question." In *Postcolonial Discourses: An Anthology*, ed. Gregory Castle (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2001), 157.
6. Barbara D. Metcalf, "Reading and Writing about Muslim Women in British India." In *Forging Identities: Community, State and Muslim Women*, ed. Zoya Hasan (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1996), 1–21.
7. *Ibid.*, 7.
8. *Ibid.*, 9.
9. *Ibid.*, 10.
10. *Ibid.*, 15.
11. Nasr, *Vanguard*, 8.
12. *Ibid.*
13. Sayyid Abu'l Ala Mawdudi, *Purdah and the Status of Woman in Islam* (1939), accessed May 29, 2015. [http://jamaatwomen.org/images/library/e-library\\_purdah.pdf](http://jamaatwomen.org/images/library/e-library_purdah.pdf)
14. Jann Dark, "Crossing the Pale: Representations of White Western Women in Indian Film and Media." *Transforming Culture* 3 (2008): 125.
15. Mawdudi, *Purdah*, 41.
16. *Ibid.*, 14.
17. *Ibid.*
18. Personal interview with film critic and writer Aijaz Gul.
19. Personal interview.
20. Fouzia Saeed, *Taboo!: The Hidden Culture of a Red Light Area* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2001).
21. The "Western" has negative connotations associated with it while the "modern" does not, or rather does not automatically. Characters can be modern and use the tools of modernity (for instance, a good education) to strengthen families, hence turning it into a desirable trait, especially among the upwardly aspiring middle class. Being Western, on the other hand, implies upholding values and lifestyles that challenge family structures and group values.
22. Mawdudi, *Purdah*, 22.
23. *Ibid.*, 41.
24. See Leila Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1992) and Metcalf, "Reading and Writing about Muslim Women."
25. Metcalf, "Reading and Writing about Muslim Women," 5.
26. Mawdudi, *Purdah*, 47.
27. Saeed, *Taboo!*
28. Mawdudi, *Purdah*, 16.
29. *Ibid.*, 53.
30. It is unclear whether they are half or step siblings.
31. Mushtaq Gazdar, *Pakistani Cinema: 1947–1997* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1997).
32. Mawdudi, *Purdah*, 37.
33. Jonathan Spencer, "Occidentalism in the East: The Uses of the West in the Politics and Anthropology of South Asia." In *Occidentalism: Images of the West*, ed. James G. Carrier (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 234–257.
34. Stuart Hall, "The Spectacle of the Other." In *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, ed. Stuart Hall (London: Sage, 1997), 267.

35. Ibid., 268.
36. E. Ann Kaplan, ed. *Women in Film Noir* (London: BFI Publishing, 1980), 35–39.
37. A parallel trend was witnessed across the border, in India, where “the line between the heroine and the vamp became a diffused blur, because the heroines began to do sensual dance numbers till the vamp’s character faded away” (*The Cabaret Effect: Political, Rebellious or Titillating?*, 2008, accessed May 29, 2015, [https://worldpulse.com/files/upload/1674/the\\_cabaret\\_effect.doc](https://worldpulse.com/files/upload/1674/the_cabaret_effect.doc), 5). See *The Cabaret Effect* for a discussion of this in a larger context of the “item number” replacing the cabaret in Bollywood, and Vasundhara Prakash’s *15 Seconds of Fame*, 2010, accessed May 29, 2015, <http://vasundharaprakash.blogspot.com.tr/2010/06/bad-girls-of-hindi-popular-cinema.html>
38. Urdu language films were seen in both East and West Pakistan and dominated the film industry in its initial years. Regional cinema came into its own in the 1970s. Mazhar Iqbal has made a very informative table that shows the number of films that were produced in the national (i.e. Urdu) and regional languages by the Pakistani film industry each year, and it can be found on his website on the Pakistani film industry at <http://mazhar.dk/film/history/>
39. Ali Khan and Ali Nobil Ahmad, “From Zinda Laash to Zibakhkhana: Violence and Horror in Pakistani Cinema.” *Third Text* 24 (2010): 157.
40. It is important to note that there is a long history of women being divided into good and bad on the basis of their “sexual purity” and moral character in South Asia (Saeed 2001) and that the *maghrabzada* woman is not her earliest manifestation in society or the Pakistani film industry. The industry, for instance, has consistently relied upon older tropes, for instance that of the courtesan or prostitute, to manifest “bad” women who, even when portrayed sympathetically (e.g. in *Umrao Jan Ada* [1973]), often have to die because of their “impure” status.

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