TANA BANA: A STUDY OF PAST AND PRESENT FEMINIST CURRENTS IN URBAN WOMEN'S RIGHTS ACTIVISM IN PAKISTAN

By

Zainab Shumail

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Supervisor: Elissa Helms
Second Supervisor: Nadia Jones-Gailani

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Abstract

This thesis studies the work of the Lahore chapters of two urban feminist collectives in Pakistan: The Women's Action Forum (WAF) and Girls@Dhabas (G@D). Contributing to literature that compares activist approaches of Second and Third Wave feminists and documenting both the rifts and commonalities between the two, I draw on feminist conceptions of the public/private divide along with Jo Reger's conceptual framework that employs concepts of "political generation", "collective identity", and the "community context" in order to analyse the narratives I collected during oral history and semi-structured interviews with WAF and G@D members. In doing so, my findings demonstrate the specific social, historical, and political contexts which shape the two groups' feminist activist practices. The thesis also highlights issues of invisibility and accessibility to information (and sometimes lack of awareness altogether) to resources documenting the work of different elements of the feminist movement in Pakistan, the impacts of which are reinforced by a lack of direct, personal communication in between the new and older generations of activists. I argue that the mutual acknowledgement of these differing contexts could lead to a more nuanced, appreciative view between the two generations of feminists about one another's work. I conclude by briefly discussing the events surrounding the Aurat March of 2019 in order to further illustrate the power of solidarity available when valuable, heartening allowances are formed— the prospects of which are otherwise lost in the rhetoric of differences which the two generations perceive to stand in conflict with one another.

Declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis is the result of original research; it contains no materials accepted for any other degree in any other institution and no materials previously written and/or published by another person, except where appropriate acknowledgement is made in the form of bibliographical reference.

I further declare that the following word counts for this thesis are accurate:

Body of thesis (all chapters excluding notes, references, appendices, etc.): 24,496 words

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Signed: _____(Zainab Shumail)

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Chapter 1. Introduction

1.1 Background to the Study

Towards the end of January 2017, the Women's Action Forum (WAF) Lahore gathered for its weekly meeting at the head office of Shirkat Gah Women's Resource Centre (SG)[1] – my employer at the time – headed by one of WAF's co-founders, Farida Shaheed. While weekly meetings were routine for WAF members, this meeting was special.

On the agenda was to brainstorm ideas to celebrate the upcoming Pakistan's Women's Day on February 12th, which would mark thirty-four years since the landmark protest in 1983, in which WAF Lahore had protested on the Mall Road against the then proposed Law of Evidence that would reduce the value of a woman's legal testimony to half that of a man's.[2] Responding to the call sent out by the Punjab Women's Lawyer Association (PWLA), about 300 women (WAF members, teachers, students, workers) braved police brutality as they were baton-charged, tear gassed and, eventually, arrested.[3] The event, unprecedented at the time, catapulted WAF to both national and international fame for courageously defying the regressive legislative suggestions when all dissenting voices were otherwise silenced by the military regime. The event thus holds major personal significance for WAF, and in the history of women's rights struggle in Pakistan.

Another unique factor distinguished that meeting from WAF's usual weekly gatherings: leading up to that evening, emails were sent out to non-WAF members inviting them to join for a collective discussion: these included members of women's collectives that had recently formed, and individual activists. The purpose of the meeting was thus not only to plan for February 12th, but to touch base with each other in person for the first time, so as to initiate what would hopefully become a series of collaborations in the future.

WAF Lahore is one of the multiple city chapters of WAF in Pakistan, and comprises of its founding and other long-time members who are still active. Some of its salient features include the academic background of most of its prominent members, and their association with leading women's rights NGOs in Pakistan which they either founded themselves or have been a part of for decades; SG was one of those NGOs, and often served as a meeting point for WAF. In addition, recently a string of younger feminist activist groups and independent activists had also surfaced, comprising of women in their mid-twenties to mid-thirties; these activists

[1] "Shirkatgah," accessed June 10, 2020, http://shirkatgah.org/.
[2] Khawar Mumtaz and Farida Shaheed, *Women of Pakistan: Two Steps Forward, One Step Back?* (Lahore: Vanguard, 1987), 106.
[3] Farida Shaheed, "MAINTAINING MOMENTUM IN CHANGING CIRCUMSTANCES," 2020, 162.

worked on issues including but not limited to mobility and access to public spaces, sexuality, digital rights and security, and other basic fundamental rights for women, trans and queer communities.

This local activist community was interlinked through mutual friends, professional colleagues and/or familial connections; another source of information about each other was print and electronic media coverage of any events/activities, and their respective social media platforms. While these factors would make cross-communication between WAF and other groups seem presumably easy, it was not the case, and a collective gathering such as this had never taken place, as no one had taken the initiative to put in the hard work to coordinate one. The very limited interaction that had taken place had been virtual, between a select few WAFers and the younger collectives on their official accounts on social media. These interactions were not always pleasant as, at any point, any disparaging comments about the work of the other would have the discussion escalate into an altercation. Labels of elitism, privilege, the inefficacy of the use of social media, the focus only on state-level, legislative and structural changes instead of consciousness-raising at grassroots level were common points of debate.

Thus, limited interaction and instances of unpleasant exchanges until that evening had ensured that knowledge about each other remained superficial at best; it also sustained a sense of mistreatment by the other on either side, as some of the older activists felt not as revered and their efforts not acknowledged enough by the youngsters, while the younger activists felt dismissed and unwelcome amongst WAF Lahore. These dynamics were underscored by a constant, perceived sense of difference in the feminist activism of the two age groups, taken almost as a given outcome of contrasting "generational" approaches that characterized the past and current "wave" of women's rights activism in Pakistan. The term generation here would be used to denote two sets of women along lines of chronological age, while the term wave was used to refer to prominent phases of feminist activism over time in Pakistan: while WAF was widely known for its strong resistance to the military regime of Zia ul Haq in the 1980s, the younger activists were currently gaining national and international recognition through their strong online presence.

I had picked up on these patterns through personal observations; working at SG had acquainted me with a string of WAF activists whose relentless activism that spanned decades, and not just the popularly known struggle in the '80s, was astonishingly unknown to me until then. Interestingly, by then I had already been involved with the contemporary activist collectives in Lahore as well, after being connected through friends/fellow activists who managed them. Thus, the idea of everyone sitting under one roof and conversing with each

other for the first time, prospects of mutual learning and potential collaborations sounded exciting and promising! However, things did not go as I had wished.

The meeting began with a round of introductions as about the 30 or so attendees were asked to state their name and organizational affiliation, if any. Following that, the meeting chair encouraged everyone to share what they wanted to discuss, as most people were meeting each other for the first time. This was met with awkward silences only, until one of my colleagues raised her hand. Introducing herself, she followed it up with describing her year-long affiliation with SG, a leading women's rights organization, and the connections she had subsequently made with women's rights activist circles; however, something seemed to be missing: "Everyone keeps using the word "movement"; I feel like everyone is doing great work in their own right – but it doesn't feel like we're a part of a movement or anything?!", she blurted out.

There were giggles around the table at how blunt the statement was; however, the silence seemed even heavier now. Personally, I was glad somebody had addressed the elephant in the room head-on instead of fumbling with vague social niceties to articulate a sensitive issue.

A discussion ensued that attempted to address why that may be, with attendees describing their activism according to what they deemed appropriate to address regarding women's rights. Two members of Girls@*Dhabas* G@D were present as well and introduced their collective: formed in 2015, G@D is a feminist collective with women's mobility and access to public spaces as the core feature of their work, and social media a major medium for documenting women's presence in public spaces. *Dhaba,* Urdu for roadside restaurant/tea stall, is taken as a quintessential public space usually predominantly occupied by men only. The basic idea is for women to frequent public spaces otherwise inaccessible to them as acts of resistance and reclamation, and capture their photographs while do as a means of feminist archiving.

A WAFer scoffed at the G@D members' input, asking what the utility was of merely sitting at restaurants and taking pictures for social media, narrating her own past struggles in the city, taking public transport, cycling, or dining at roadside restaurants as being nothing new; in addition, she said, social media activism did not amount to much, and that G@D's approach reeked of elitism altogether. Understandably, this soured the air with one G@D member flaring up while the other trying to calm her down.

The tension resulting from the exchange seemed to drain the space of any potential to have a level-headed conversation. As described above, the meeting was significant as being the first of its kind gathering, and it was imperative that differences in approaches be discussed

with sensitivity and openness that enabled collaboration. However, an exchange mirroring the previous online spats just reinforced the perceived sense of mistrust and inaccessibility of the other. An opportunity to learn about and from each other was lost; The discussion that followed could not bring together any concrete suggestions for February 12th, and was thus postponed to the next weekly WAF meeting, with attendees asked to send their ideas in the meantime. The meeting dispersed with pleasantries exchanged and promises to remain in touch. However, a week later, no concrete suggestions had come in. Eventually, the event was called off

This project arose from the promise that I saw in the potential conversations that could have taken place between the two sets of activists, and the eventual disappointment and frustrations resulting from repeated unsuccessful attempts at doing so. For I believe that if they had taken place, it could have resulted in increased appreciation of the other with an acceptance of differences, resulting in possible alliances. The written thesis that follows is the result of my own qualitative research, in which I sought out members from both groups and conducted a series of oral history, semi-structured interviews to understand more about their histories, aims, and perceptions—both perceptions of their own work and of the other generation. It additionally draws from my review of written work and online activity over the course of various periods. In the remainder of this chapter, I offer a historical overview to set the stage for further discussion and provide an outline of the structure of my discussion.

1.2 A Historical Overview of the Women's Struggle in Pakistan

Mumtaz and Shaheed, while periodizing Muslim women's activism in the sub-continent, describe that large numbers of Muslim women got involved in the nationalist movement that led to the creation of Pakistan in 1947.[4] It was unprecedented for women to openly and publicly participate in political actions such as street agitation which gave them the liberty and space to act on their politics. Their participation was streamlined by institutionalising it through political bodies that were formed to facilitate it and drive the independence movement further. The women who took the lead were from the highly educated, upper class of society who had the political and social capital that provided them access to the political centre-stage (such as the party leadership of the ML).[5]

Following independence, the reigns of directing women's participation in the public sphere were once again in the hands of bourgeois women who had already been politically active during the independence movement. Led by the wife of Pakistan's first Prime Minister,

[4] Mumtaz and Shaheed, *Women of Pakistan*.
[5] Mumtaz and Shaheed, 44.

Begum Rana Liaqat Khan, organizations were created to channel women's skills and support specifically for the most pressing causes at the time – primarily relief work and social welfare for the thousands of displaced refugees following the partition of the subcontinent.[6] Relief work, in turn, became a major mobilising opportunity for women and their efforts culminated into the formation of the All Pakistan Women's Association (APWA) in 1949, a voluntary organisation geared towards generating "educational, social and cultural consciousness amongst them [women] and improving opportunities for participation in economic development."[7] While Mumtaz and Shaheed, and Rouse agree that APWA had a distinct "charitable nature"[8] owing to its focus on social welafre causes for women, the former duo highlight that APWA was also active in safeguarding women's rights in the political, socio-economic and legal spheres where it recommended having women's reserved seats in the National and Provincial assemblies and provided free legal aid to women; it also worked with the governments in a consultative capacity, presenting recommendations based on its research.[9] APWA also led the lobbying efforts for the formation of the Family Laws Commission which finally presented the Family Laws Ordinance, eventually passed in 1961.[10]

The transition into the 1970s was marked by changes in women's favour both socio-economically and politically. The former entailed the emergence of a middle class which meant the ushering in of women into the labour force and the transformation of societal attitudes that had previously discouraged it. The latter involves the mass mobilization of women for political purposes, in part triggered by the opposition that brought down the preceding Ayyub Khan government, and the systematic focus of the incoming Prime Minister Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto (ZAB) and his Pakistan People's Party (PPP) on women's political involvement and rights. This entailed women's exposure both to grassroots political activism and constitutional provisions for women which safeguarded them from discrimination, and reserved seats for their representation in political bodies.[11]

Other extremely significant events to note regarding women's groups at this time include the mushrooming of women's civil society organizations; in part boosted by the

[6] Mumtaz and Shaheed, 50.
[7] Mumtaz and Shaheed, 52.
[8] S. Rouse, "Women's Movement in Pakistan: State, Class, Gender," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 6, no. 1 (March 1, 1986): 11, https://doi.org/10.1215/07323867-6-1-30.
[9] Mumtaz and Shaheed, *Women of Pakistan*, 53.
[10] Under this law, women were officially able to inherit agricultural property (in consonance with Islamic law), second marriages were made contingent upon agreement by the first wife, divorce was made more difficult for the male, women attained the right to initiate divorce for the first time, and a system of registration of marriages was also introduced. Rouse, "Women's Movement in Pakistan," 11.
[11] Mumtaz and Shaheed, *Women of Pakistan*, 62–63.

government's efforts which included Pakistan's participation in the International Women's Year in 1975 - headed by ZAB's wife, Ms. Nusrat Bhutto - and its subsequent launch in the country. Moreover, new women's organizations such as the Women's Front, Aurat and Shirkat Gah - Women's Resource Centre (SG) (also described in the previous section of the thesis) emerged, which centred women's experiences as their subjects of study and work. It was from amongst women involved in these small-scale organizations that an organized, formal resistance to the military dictatorship emerged in the 1980s.[12]

ZAB met his downfall in 1977 when, following a military coup, the then Chief of Army Staff, Zia ul Haq (henceforth referred to as Zia) assumed presidency in 1978 and ruled the country until his death in 1988. Zia's rule coincided with the Soviet Occupation in Afghanistan in which Pakistan became a frontline ally for the US – providing the human resources trained under the political version of Islam that appealed to the notions of Muslim brotherhood in order to combat the 'ungodly' communists in Afghanistan. In a country where religious ideology sells, Rubina Saigol aptly states that the regional political dynamics "provided the perfect opportunity [for Zia] to gain legitimacy by wrapping himself in an Islamic garb",[13] as his usurpation of power from a democratically elected head of state was essentially illegal. While radical changes were made across sectors of education, judiciary and banking, a range of measures also clamped down on the rights and fundamental liberties of women. Women's mobility and access to public spaces was curtailed as their bodies were policed.[14] Equally worrying were the spate of regressive, anti-women laws that were being passed in the name of Islam - the most horrendous being the Zina Ordinance which conflated rape cases with adultery, thus incriminating the woman survivor in cases of rape, its punishment being stoning to death; and the Law of Evidence, which reduced the validity of women's testimonies to half that of men's.[15] It was the impact of these Islamization measures that eventually galvanized a group of urban, educated women to form finally form WAF, and fight.

From then onwards, the nature of the women's rights activism depended on the surrounding political, socio-cultural environment as activists navigated back-and-forth phases of military rule and democracy which varied in their levels of openness to advance women's rights. The relentless attacks on women's rights but a simultaneous widespread clampdown on political dissent during Zia's martial law necessitated that public shows of resistance, which

[12] Mumtaz and Shaheed, 62–68.
[13] Dr Rubina Saigol, "Feminism and the Women's Movement in Pakistan: Actors, Debates and Strategies," Country Report (Islamabad, Pakistan: Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 2016), 14, fes-asia.org.
[14] Saigol, 14.
[15] Mumtaz and Shaheed, *Women of Pakistan*, 106.

demonstrated numerical strength against the regime, were organized. Therefore, WAF opted for street agitation, picketing and organizing '*jalsas'* (public gathering)[16] for awareness raising against the military regime's tactics in the general public.[17]

The following government of Pakistan's first female head of state, Benazir Bhutto, lifted the sense of defensiveness felt previously by activists who, responding to the government's openness to work with them, changed gears from confrontational activism to "mainstreaming of the women's feminist movement into society and state"; this entailed systematically engaging with the government, bureaucracy and political parties to advocate and lobby for rights, broadening networks by forming coalitions with other struggles that were not specifically related to women, and infusing women's rights into the development sector through the proliferation of well-resourced NGOs in the 1990s.[18] Over the years, the struggle for women's rights that began by a handful of activists in the '80s has expanded to include myriad movement actors as allies in the civil society, those waging other human rights struggles, in the media, and in political parties and state bodies. Legislative successes include, amongst others, laws against child marriages, domestic violence, harassment at workplace and honour killings.[19] In addition, women's studies programs have also formed and advances made in securing women's representation in provincial and national legislative bodies.

While these gains have been underway for years, in the meantime, another section of civil society increasingly voicing demands for women's rights has been the feminist collectives that have surfaced lately in urban parts of Pakistan. These collectives are voluntary, non-partisan and non-funded, and work on a diverse range of women's and LGBTQ rights. The use of social media is central to their activities as they amass a following of thousands of people online, gaining national and international attention and acclaim.

As the background section demonstrated earlier, differences in the choice of women's issues, tactics and tools for activism vary in different times, and are likely to be taken as bases of conflict between groups active in different times in history, thus categorized into older and younger "generations". As briefly touched upon in this section, however, these differences appear to be a consequence of the evolving socio-cultural and political environment around. This thesis aims to elaborate on these various dynamics, through activists' personal narratives

[16] In WAF's context here, the word refers to a public event (resembling a mix between a rally and a meeting, as the authors describe it), combining various forms of creative expression revolving around the women's issue.
[17] Mumtaz and Shaheed, *Women of Pakistan*, 133–37.
[18] Andrea Fleschenberg, "Military Rule, Religious Fundamentalism, Women's Empowerment and Feminism in Pakistan," in *Women's Movements in Asia: Feminisms and Transnational Activism*, ed. Mina Roces and Louise Edwards (Oxford: Routledge, 2010), 177.
[19] Naeem Mirza, "Seven Pro-Women Laws in Seven Years," *Legislative Watch*, no. 38 (December 2011): 8.

that reflect on how their activism has been shaped by their personal politics, and the surrounding environment; in doing so, it will be addressing claims of commonly presumed "generational differences" between older and younger activists.

1.3 Thesis Outline

In Chapter 2, I begin with a brief historiographical overview of how the urban women's movement in Pakistan has been documented, and WAF's place in it. I then proceed to review literature on themes of women's and feminist movements, approaches to organizing and debates that accompany these approaches, how the use of the "wave" narrative impacts perceptions of past activism, and, finally, a landscape of the feminist movement at the present moment. This is followed by a conceptual framework that shapes my analysis of my findings.

Chapter 3 discusses my method of using of oral history and semi-structured interviews with the activists and offers my reflections on the overall experiences of conducting fieldwork. I likewise briefly discuss my positionality and the research ethics I applied to the present project. In Chapters 4 and 5, I analyse the narratives of WAF and G@D members, who spoke to me in detail about their activism— how an interplay of life experiences and the surrounding community context shapes shared collective identities that determine the form and course of their activism. In Chapter 6, I juxtapose the perspectives, grievances, and notes of appreciation of the two about each other and highlight factors which account for sustaining the divide between them. I conclude with a brief reflection on this research experience, summing up the narratives I collected and ending on a positive note, made possible by the events which unfolded as this thesis was being completed.

Chapter 2. From Past to Present: Movements, Waves, Generations

2.1 Historiographical Overview: The Documented History of the Urban Women's Movement in Pakistan

This section will present a historiographical review of the literature on what is touted to be the women's movement in Pakistan. Khan and Kirmani, in their review of the discourse on women's activism in Pakistan rightly identify that the scholarship so far has tended to focus only on women's struggles that either purport a secular identity or a completely opposite, Islamist one.[20] The former, which will also be the focus of this historiographical review, refers to the activism that arose against Zia's military regime in the '80s - of which WAF is considered a frontrunner – and its evolution since.[21] The authors point out that most of the scholarship about this movement has been penned by WAF activists themselves. As the historiography will demonstrate, although this literature evolves to include various actors and document myriad aspects of the struggle over time, it is eventually traced back to WAF's emergence and resistance to the military regime in the 1980s.

WAF arose as a lone, fierce opposition to Zia's relentless attacks on women's rights in Pakistan; the scholarship in the 1980s is both reflective of its position as the frontrunner of that opposition, and anticipatory in nature for its future. Some of the most prominent texts include those by WAF co-founders Mumtaz and Shaheed, *Women of Pakistan: Two Steps Forward, One Step Back?*[22] which go in deep detail about the collective's journey under martial law; other texts produced are also authored by either WAF co-founders or those closely associated with it. Phrases that refer to WAF as the "key expression of the women's movement in Pakistan"[23] or that the country's women's movement began with the formation of WAF highlight its significant position at the time. Common themes across these texts include highlighting WAF's achievements in women's consciousness-raising, the removal of discriminatory state policies against women and registering the woman's question at the national level; recommendations for future include ensuring the broadening of its base to link up with other social justice struggles for its sustainability and adopting a secular identity.

[20] Ayesha Khan and Nida Kirmani, "Moving Beyond the Binary: Gender-Based Activism in Pakistan," 2018, 41.
[21] Khan and Kirmani, 153.
[22] Mumtaz and Shaheed, *Women of Pakistan*.
[23] Rouse, "Women's Movement in Pakistan," 11. See also Mumtaz and Shaheed, *Women of Pakistan*; Hina Jilani, "The Pakistan Women's Action Forum: Struggling Against Islamic Fundamentalism," *Canadian Woman Studies/ Les Cahiers de La Femme* 7, no. 1 & 2 (1986): 107–10; Fauzia Gardezi, "Islam, Feminism and the Women's Movement in Pakistan: 1981–1991*," in *Women in Peace Politics*, 3 vols. (New Delhi: SAGE Publications India Pvt Ltd, 2008), 97–111, https://doi.org/10.4135/9788178299686; Khawar Mumtaz, "Khawateen Mahaz-e-Amal and Sindhiani Tehrik: Two Responses to Political Development in Pakistan," *South Asia Bulletin* XI, no. 1 & 2 (1991): 101–9.

As the Introduction detailed earlier, the restoration of democracy and the complete change of political atmosphere as Bhutto took over as PM, made the women's struggle shift gears entirely. Making most of the state's openness to advance women's rights, women's organizations, most prominent of which were headed by WAFers, expanded their bases through increased available donor funding,[24] and engaged in extensive advocacy and lobbying with state bodies. Weiss writes that the NGOs became hubs of knowledge production on women's lives.[25] Khan and Kirmani agree, stating that "the women's movement has been prolific in generating research, and through its NGO work providing the majority of the discourse and analysis that forms the basis of knowledge production about gender in Pakistan". These contributions manifested in tangible successes for women's struggle in the country, as the produced research would be used as a knowledge base to pursue greater rights.[26][27]

It is important to note how Khan and Kirmani refer to the women's movement here: in contrast to the '80s when WAF was heralded as the frontrunner of the struggle, the movement now comes to include the contributions of the "NGO work" as well, not just WAF (the independent, autonomous coalition only). Interestingly, right below the authors list the myriad successes of the above-mentioned research, lobbying and advocacy achieved by the movement, they remark,

> "Although the women's movement may have waned, dispersed and to a large extent become NGO-ised during the 1990s - a fate that has befallen women's movements across the world - women's rights activists have maintained an impressive influence on policy-making and legislative reform."[28]

This suggest a sense of loss of the autonomous movement that existed in the 1980s, as the activists who spearheaded it were now preoccupied with their respective women's organizations, resulting in what the authors refer to as a "decline of the public profile of the women's movement since the 1990s".[29]

This has resulted in widespread critique of the WAFers who are held responsible for the eventual NGOisation of the women's movement in Pakistan. Terms like "gender" and "NGOisation "institutionalization" and "depoliticization" of the women's movement appear in

[24] Saigol, "Feminism and the Women's Movement in Pakistan: Actors, Debates and Strategies," 21.
[25] The themes of this research included female education, the rise in domestic violence, or increasing women's political participation.
[26] Khan and Kirmani, "Moving Beyond the Binary: Gender-Based Activism in Pakistan," 159.
[27] Khan and Kirmani list them as: material on sexual and reproductive rights, environmental issues, citizen-based initiatives for peace between India and Pakistan, restoration of a quota for women in elected assemblies, other legislative reforms. Khan and Kirmani, 160.
[28] Khan and Kirmani, 160.
[29] Khan and Kirmani, 174.

the scholarship about the movement in the 1990s and onwards, including from within WAFers' writings as well.[30] Nighat Khan, the most vocal critic of the NGOisation phenomenon has written extensively on its impact, and the resultant critique levelled on the activists. Khan laments NGOisation to have diffused the energy in the movement, give a false sense of commitment that comes with doing paid, political activism[31] and depoliticizing the movement by incorporating the word "gender" instead of "woman" in it – thus nullifying the existence of structural inequalities shaping women's gendered experiences.[32]

This discussion will be taken further in Chapter 4.

2.2 Literature Review

2.2.1 Social Movements, Women's Movements, Feminist Movements

Mc Bride and Mazur describe features that can be employed to identify women's movements and distinguish them from feminist movements. The former include making claims for women's rights, as women, in cognizance of the gendered realities of their lives;[33] these claims emanate from a "gender conscious" discourse that contains "ideas, arguments, goals, and claims, all containing language about gendered identity of women.[34] Feminist movements on the other hand involve all the aforementioned basic features of the women's movement. However, they include additional features that confer upon them a transformative nature missing in women's movement. These additional features include the goal to change the position of women in society and politics, through gender equity, change the subordinate nature of women's position in society and transform any existing gender-based hierarchies.[35] Basu highlights that there skepticism to feminism is rampant, which emanates from a perception that it demands a transformation of any existing social order.[36] She maintains that there are various ways in which women's movements choose to engage with issues such as violence and sexuality along with the various levels of engagement that can be employed; ultimately, the

[30]F Bari and S Khattak, "Power Configurations in Public and Private Arenas: The Women's Movement's Response," in *Power and Civil Society in Pakistan*, ed. Weiss and Giliani (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2001), 217–47; Saigol, "Feminism and the Women's Movement in Pakistan: Actors, Debates and Strategies."

[31] Nighat Said Khan, "Up Against the State: The Women's Movement in Pakistan – Implications for the Global Women's Movement" (Annual Dame Nita Barrow Lecture, Toronto, ON, Canada, 1999), 6, http://hdl.handle.net/10625/34066.

[32] Nighat Khan, "The Women's Movement Revisted: Areas of Concern for Future," in *Global Feminist Politics*, ed. Suki Ali and Kelly Coate, 1st ed. (Routledge, 2000), 8.

[33] Dorothy E. McBride and Amy G. Mazur, "Women's Movements, Feminism, and Feminist Movements," in *Politics, Gender, and Concepts*, ed. Gary Goertz and Amy G. Mazur (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 236, https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511755910.010.

[34] McBride and Mazur, 228.

[35] McBride and Mazur, 236.

[36] Amrita Basu, ed., *Women's Movements in the Global Era: The Power of Local Feminisms*, Second edition (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2017).

success of a women's movement is not to be observed only in large formal organizations, but that small-scale initiatives also add buoyancy to the movement and sustain it over time.[37]

Saltzman lists down three analytical levels along which the effect of social movements on the gender order can be gauged.[38] First, at the "interactional level" where the changes can be looked for in the ways men and women learn gendered behaviour and expectations, and perform them on a daily basis. Second, the "structural level" where it maintains hierarchies and sustains inequalities that shape all aspects of social life, due to its omnipresence in the structures of the state, family, and the workplace. Third, their impact on shaping/challenging the gender order can be seen on a "cultural level", as expressed in prevalent ideologies, socio-cultural practices, religious beliefs, and in mediums like art, media etcetera.[39]

Over time, these levels of engagement are employed by women variably; often times, differences in forms of political engagement can contrast and cause conflicts between activists. Schuster writes about this conflict between second wave and third wave feminists and rightly points out that differences between their femnist practice, of engaging on a structural level as opposed to engaging on a personal/cultural level emerge from differences in interpretation of the original quote "personal is political" by Carol Hanisch, which detailed how women's individual discriminatory experiences in their private lives are, in fact, a result of structural inequalities in patriarchal societies; instead of individual solutions, political responses of collective, movement-like actions were warranted by women to identify and counter these discriminatory societal dynamics.[40] Thus, for second wave feminists, personal experiences become political by virtue of a shared gendered identity that is subjected to patriarchal power structures; these personal experiences underscore the collective political activism and demands of second wave feminists. In contrast, third wave feminists take the slogan to mean that personal and individual, quotidian acts, if feminist, hold political value. As opposed to second wave's collective action approach, third wave feminists enact their politics individually in their everyday actions that challenge gender inequalities; these could range from making feminist statements with fashion and consumer choices, using social media to raise awareness for

[37] Basu, 7–14.

[38] Janet Saltzman Chafetz, ed., *Handbook of the Sociology of Gender*, Handbooks of Sociology and Social Research (New York, NY: Springer, 2006), 149.

[39] Chafetz, 149.

[40] Julia Schuster, "Why the Personal Remained Political: Comparing Second and Third Wave Perspectives on Everyday Feminism," *Social Movement Studies* 16, no. 6 (November 2, 2017): 649, https://doi.org/10.1080/14742837.2017.1285223.

feminist issues…and incorporating feminist values into romantic relationships, friendships and family life.[41]

Subsequently, second wavers critique third wave politics as being "politically regressive" and devoid of any transformative potential[42] as its proponents fail to provide "a sustained analysis of how these personal stories fit into a larger political picture."[43] It is presumed to have a "free-for-all" nature, where personal experiences are not substantiated as being consequences of a "larger political picture", and involves any set of ideas and practices adopted and given up as per convenience.[44] A sense of false feminism is cautioned against whereby any resistance per se, by virtue of being done as a female, can be presumed as feminism.[45] These critiques are underscored by a narrative of loss of the "right kind" of feminist activism, which once existed in the past.[46]

2.2.2 Waves

Nadasen states that the 'wave' metaphor enables one to "make sense of feminism and the chronology of women's activism"[47] in the US by means of its convenient encapsulation of feminist activism into "neatly packaged" peaks and troughs.[48] Gallagher agrees and adds that the metaphor's indispensability lies in it enabling the historians to conveniently compare one period with another, as the 'wave' like trajectory is easy to "frame an historical narrative around";[49] the opportunity to draw comparisons between past and contemporary activism that links the two presents another function of the metaphor: Nicholson states that viewing surges in activism as 'wave's amplifies the historical significance of past activism, while showing subsequent phases as continuations of it as opposed to being "historical aberrations".[50]

Further, she states that the term is particularly suitable for identifying periods of activism characterized by mass mobilization of people that employ "public, noisy and challenging" mediums to push for social change.[51] Gallagher identifies how these 'wave'-like

[41] Schuster, 649.
[42] Susan Archer Mann and Douglas J. Huffman, "The Decentering of Second Wave Feminism and the Rise of the Third Wave," *Science & Society* 69, no. 1 (January 2005): 56–91, https://doi.org/10.1521/siso.69.1.56.56799.
[43] Alison Piepmeier and Rory Dicker, *Catching a Wave: Reclaiming Feminism for the 21st Century* (UPNE, 2003), 12.
[44] Piepmeier and Dicker, 17.
[45] Amber E Kinser, "Negotiating Spaces for/through Third-Wave Feminism," *NWSA Journal, Johns Hopkins University Press* 16, no. 3 (2004): 144.
[46] Jonathan Dean, "On the March or on the Margins? Affirmations and Erasures of Feminist Activism in the UK," *European Journal of Women's Studies* 19, no. 3 (August 2012): 323, https://doi.org/10.1177/1350506812443620.
[47] Kathleen A. Laughlin et al., "Is It Time to Jump Ship? Historians Rethink the Waves Metaphor," *Feminist Formations* 22, no. 1 (2010): 98, https://doi.org/10.1353/nwsa.0.0118.
[48] Kathleen A. Laughlin et al., 104.
[49] Kathleen A. Laughlin et al., 84.
[50] Linda Nicholson, "Feminism in 'Waves': Useful Metaphor or Not?," *New Politics* XII, no. 4 (2015): 1.
[51] Nicholson, 5.

phases of mass mobilization are invariably characterized by the participation of white, middle class women,[52] which is the result of their race and class privilege that enabled them to capture and sustain media and political attention, thus amplifying their activism and reinforcing its visibility.[53] The metaphor therefore documents the activism of the middle-class white women, and their subsequent successes in compelling the power elites to address their demands.[54]

While the 'wave' term makes for an accurate metaphorical representation of those loud, public events, Nadasen points out how the convenience that comes with using it trades off the "complexity of everyday women's lives and feminist organizing" by overlooking occurrences that may not be as visible and loud, but are equally significant to be recorded in the history of feminist activism in the US.[55] Terming it as the "day-to-day trench work", Nadasen emphasises how the work of "thousands of nameless, hardworking activists" gets obscured as she likens such "local and low-key organizing in communities" to "seemingly still waters of everyday activism" in contrast to a 'wave.'[56]

The impact of overlooking relatively less grandiose, visible and silent undercurrents of activism, in addition, makes for another shortcoming of the use of the 'wave metaphor'; when contrasted with notions of success associated with mass mobilisation of women and its widespread coverage and amplification in national media and popular culture - phases marked by what is described above as "seemingly still waters" are mistaken to be devoid of any political activism. Leila Rupp and Verta Taylor describe these phases as "doldrums"[57] and Nadasen uses this term to denote periods that either precede wave-like watershed events, or fall between two wave-like phases in feminist activism.[58] Given the perceived break in the momentum of political activism, notions of disappointment and failure get associated with these intermediate periods.

Adding to this point, Nicholson elaborates how feminism is understood to have died after the First Wave, simply because years of quietude followed the passing of the Nineteenth Amendment - followed by its apparent resurgence in the 1960s as the Second Wave This understanding of the trajectory of feminism is underscored by assumptions that the intermediate years between the two 'waves' were devoid of any political progress (as discussed above); and a perceived uniformity in political goals of the two 'waves' over time (understood

[52] Kathleen A. Laughlin et al., "Is It Time to Jump Ship?," 82.
[53] Kathleen A. Laughlin et al., 84.
[54] Kathleen A. Laughlin et al., 82.
[55] Kathleen A. Laughlin et al., 104.
[56] Kathleen A. Laughlin et al., 98.
[57] As quoted by Kathleen A. Laughlin et al., 103.
[58] Kathleen A. Laughlin et al., 103.

as one, singular form of feminism) where the subsequent 'wave' continued the political project from where it seemed to have discontinued in the past.

Nicholson demonstrates the dangers of viewing the temporality of gender activism as a uniform, unchanging set of ideas sporadically shooting up as 'waves' in disjointed moments in history; this perceived uniformity obscures the "historical specificity" of the various motivations and distinct ideas that constitute each period of activism, along with the context-specific conditions that may either enable or inhibit those ideas in that particular time.[59] When combined with a false sense of failure that takes root when loud and visible, 'wave'-like phases of activism fade out into subsequent, relatively quiescent, periods of collective struggle, this becomes additionally problematic. Instead, she posits that, the history of gender activism be seen as a continuum instead, with various phases (high or low) characterized by their own respective conditions that determined which ideas were formulated, successful and left behind, only to be picked up later and pushed further when conditions changed for the better. In this way, with events during each period taken into consideration, the actual evolution of gender activism becomes evident and can, in fact, be seen as a measure of the movement's success over the years.

2.2.3 NGOisation

Describing the rapid growth of NGOs in Latin America in the 1990s as a 'boom', Alvarez details its impact on women's mobilizations as their "more movement-oriented" activities began taking a backseat.[60] Ironically, this shift in activism was, in fact, a strategic response to the resurgence of democracy at the time in the region: feminists now sought to use their technical skills of research and advocacy to translate their "feminist project of cultural–political transformation into concrete gender policy proposals".[61] The operative form embodied by NGOs registers them as workable with various entities, donors states and other civil society actors alike, as Bernal and Grewal identify; in a process called "NGOisation", NGOs then use this form to their advantage, gaining public and institutional recognition by means of establishing their authority through the provision of "issue-specific…marketable expert knowledge".[62] The legitimacy of the authority associated with this institutional expertise compels NGOs to engage in a cyclical process of reinforcing that institutional nature in a

[59] Nicholson, "Feminism in 'Waves': Useful Metaphor or Not?," 2.
[60] Sonia Alvarez, "Beyond NGO-Ization?: Reflections from Latin America," *Development* 52 (June 1, 2009): 287, https://doi.org/10.1057/dev.2009.23.
[61] Alvarez, 288.
[62] Victoria Bernal and Inderpal Grewal, *Theorizing NGOs: States, Feminisms, and Neoliberalism* (Duke University Press, 2014).

process termed "professionalisation". This entails the formation and the need to constantly maintain, vertically hierarchical structures embedded in "business-like operations with a professional work ethic".[63] Taken one step further, "institutionalisation" refers to the routinization of processes and operative frameworks that sustain the organization and ensure its survival. In addition, bureaucratic measures that need to be executed in response to donor demands of accountability and transparency further reinforce this institutional nature. Institutionalisation, in addition, also refers to the inroads NGOs make into government and transnational platforms to provide their input; the resultant institutional visibility bolsters reputation and confers legitimacy and validity on the organizations' ability to provide expertise in certain areas.

Alvarez highlights that such measures constituting the "NGOisation" process impact NGOs work in that they are compelled "to focus their energies and resources on more technical, less contestatory activities".[64] Apart from the redirected energies and resources, Lang states that a shift takes place from "advocacy from public arenas to institutional advocacy"[65] as Institutionalisation provides avenues for collaborative work between NGOs and national, international and transnational institutions, as discussed above. This distinction between activism and advocacy, the move away from more "movement-oriented" nature of NGOs, is evident in the new role and corresponding inputs of NGOs in these institutional spaces where they are expected to function primarily as technical "gender experts", rather than as independent, critical group of citizens advocating for women's rights.[66] Their critical outlook may be further restricted if the parties, such as the state, sub-contracting work to it would otherwise be held accountable to and responsible for bringing effective change in line with the NGOs' inputs, if not for this interdependent relationship. Institutions with a more critical outlook are thus at a disadvantage of being silenced, as they are passed over and work selectively subcontracted to other institutions. For the selected NGOs, however, this brings visibility and recognition as mentioned above, and also underscores a misguided assumption that they "serve as intermediaries" or spokespersons for the wider society.[67]

Alvarez cautions against this foregrounding of the "technical-professional side" of feminist NGOs[68] to severely impact their prospects of conducting critical feminist advocacy.

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[63] Sabine Lang, *NGOs, Civil Society, and the Public Sphere* (Cambridge University Press, 2012), 71.
[64] Alvarez, "Beyond NGO-Ization?: Reflections from Latin America," 289.
[65] Lang, *NGOs, Civil Society, and the Public Sphere*, 74.
[66] Alvarez, "Beyond NGO-Ization?: Reflections from Latin America," 288–89.
[67] Alvarez, 288.
[68] Sonia E. Alvarez, "Advocating Feminism: The Latin American Feminist NGO 'Boom,'" *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 1, no. 2 (January 1999): 182–83, https://doi.org/10.1080/146167499359880.

Much of the criticism of NGOs' work arises out of the perceived bluntness in the critical and political outlook of their engagements, as discussed above. However, Inderpal and Grewal also highlight how NGOs have come to be understood as uniform entities; following from the title non-government, NGOs are "assumed to not be the state"[69] – the vastness of this term thus encompasses all forms of organizations and political projects, regardless of the extent of their liberal or conservative nature. Therefore, they insist that even though NGOs may share a focus on women and gender, they are heterogenous in strategies and actions and should be understood as such. Lang shares this view and identifies the organization's size, culture, target population and the available range of strategies at any point as some of the factors along which one may NGO may vary from another.[70] Dissuading from declaring a reductive verdict on the entire NGO sector's performance and contribution, Lang registers the importance of seeing their work in context of the "constraints and opportunities" that inform their organizational structure, strategies and actions.[71] Murdock also problematizes the frequent question regarding whether NGOs are "Doing Good" or not.[72] She describes how the query is problematic on an epistemological level: the process of any research on this question is impacted by one's subjective opinions about the efficacy of development vis a vis the role of the NGOs, and is also misplaced as the dynamics and performances of NGOs are not static in nature. Moreover, she also cautions against this line of questioning as the repercussions of its findings may have material consequences for NGOs already hard-pressed for resources. Instead, much like Lang, she proposes a nuanced approach whereby the role and performances of NGOs are studied and evaluated in a broader political, economic and social context set by the state and donor bodies, and the ways that NGOs wade through the myriad resultant circumstances that enable and/or restrict their initiatives.[73]

2.3 Conceptual Framework

2.3.1. Conceptualising Generations: An Interplay of Experiences, Collective Identity and the Community

Mannheim's concept of political generations serves as a starting point for my temporal study and evaluation of feminist political activism in Pakistan.[74] He conceptualises political

[69] Bernal and Grewal, *Theorizing NGOs*, 7.
[70] Lang, *NGOs, Civil Society, and the Public Sphere*.
[71] Lang, 62.
[72] Donna F. Murdock, "That Stubborn 'Doing Good?' Question: Ethical/Epistemological Concerns in the Study of NGOs," *Ethnos* 68, no. 4 (December 2003): 507–32, https://doi.org/10.1080/0014184032000160541.
[73] F. Murdock, 511.
[74] Karl Mannheim and Paul Kecskemeti, "The Problem of Generations," in *Karl Mannheim: Essays* (Routledge, 1952), 276–322.

generations as groups of individuals, who share similar age groups and class identities, to have the same location in social and historical processes; this limits them to "a specific range of potential experiences, predisposing them for a certain characteristic mode of thought and experience, and a characteristic type of historically relevant action".[75] This view of a political generation implies a linear, causal relationship between one's historical and common experiences and emphasises adolescence as the sole formative period in individuals' lives;[76] however, feminist critiques on such conceptualisation term it reductive and insufficient. Schneider terms them gender-neutral, stating that such conceptualisations overlook the social organization of gender in society: the sole emphasis on one's youth as the developmental phase of one's political consciousness is a derivative of a "model of rebellion and change based almost exclusively in male developmental and historical experience".[77] Once gender is factored in, however, the analysis of how political relations are structured, one's own development of political consciousness, and the practice of politics gets nuanced; along with just age, variables of one's gender and sex identities factor in as well. In addition, the specific period at which women become involved in a women's movement - not necessarily only in youth, and regardless of biological age - and the experiences that lead up to it have a significant bearing on their political outlooks as well.[78]

Thus, centring women's experiences problematizes formerly "taken-for-granted assumptions of who, how, and when social groups come to experience similar perceptions and understandings of reality".[79] This implies an ever-evolving process of the formation of political generations: a dynamic interplay between women's subjective aged, gendered and sexed experiences and their surrounding social environment - the political understandings that result shape individuals' political outlooks and practices.[80] These ideological outlooks and political practices emanate out of a collective identity of a group of individuals who share similar experiences and external social environment, and who enter the movement at around the same time. Whittier calls these groups "micro-cohorts which are subsets of political generations; when the above-mentioned constitutive factors of a collective identity change, politicizing experiences change, and thus, a different micro-cohort forms with its own distinct collective

[75] Mannheim and Kecskemeti, 291.
[76] Nancy Whittier, "Political Generations, Micro-Cohorts, and the Transformation of Social Movements," *American Sociological Review* 62, no. 5 (October 1997): 762, https://doi.org/10.2307/2657359.
[77] Beth E. Schneider, "Political Generations and the Contemporary Women's Movement," *Sociological Inquiry* 58, no. 1 (January 1988): 5, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-682X.1988.tb00252.x.
[78] Schneider, 9.
[79] Schneider, 6.
[80] Jo Reger, *Everywhere and Nowhere: Contemporary Feminism in the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 17.

identity.[81] While one political generation differs from another, differences within each political generation exist as well, owing to distinct collective identities that imply an evolution of the social, political and cultural context of a community, but also the state of the women's movement in it.[82]

Taylor and Whittier detail the process of a collective identity formation and Maintenace of a group into three steps. The first is boundary formation, whereby a group of individuals with shared political outlooks distinguish themselves from the web of other social actors in a given community. The authors state that boundary markers are essential to a group's collective identity as thr group's commonalities are reinforced, and shape interactions with out group actors. The second crucial constituent of a collective identity is group consciousness, which are shared interpretive frameworks through which the collective's interests are defined in opposition to the dominant order. Third, the process of negotiation define a group's actions, as it pertains to engaging with the dominant order and challenging symbolic, established negative meanings to demand recognition respect on their own terms. [83]

For this thesis, I will be using Reger's conceptual framework that bridges Schneider's description of a political generation with the concept of collective identities through the surrounding community context. In other words, Reger states that "the formation of contemporary feminist identities are responses of a political generation within a community context". [84] Thus, as the community context changes over time, individual's surrounding circumstances change, resulting in variation in collective identities over time. It is pertinent here to examine how the concept of community is defined here: Reger describes community as a place with its cultural, political, social opportunities which could vary over time, thus presenting hostile or favourable environment to activists to respond to as they shape their activism by the specific tools and strategies chosen.[85] Notions of a movement's "fragmentation or decline", owing to a variation in activist identity are done away with then, as Reger, instead sees them as differences and similarities resulting from political generation shaped by the cultural and political environment in a community context.

[81] Whittier, "Political Generations, Micro-Cohorts, and the Transformation of Social Movements," 263.
[82] Whittier, 764.
[83] Verta Taylor and Nancy E. Whittier, "Collective Identity in Social Movement Communities: Lesbian Feminist Mobilization.," in *Frontiers in Social Movement Theory.*, ed. A. D. Morris and C. M. Mueller (New Haven, CT, US: Yale University Press, 1992), 111–23.
[84] Reger, *Everywhere and Nowhere*, 20.
[85] Reger, 6.

2.3.2 Distinguishing between the Public and Private

Delineating the distinction between the public and private spheres, Squires states that liberal discourses separate it as a distinction between the "public authority of the state" and the realm of voluntary relations between individuals in the market respectively. In contrast, classical traditions distinguish between the two as the separation between the "domestic sphere of production and reproduction inhabited by women and slaves", and "the *polis,* where the public sphere is equated with the political, though not the politics of an administrative state (as in the liberal distinction), but the politics of discussions, deliberation, collective decision-making and action in concert".[86]

Liberal discourses, however, produce further versions of the public-private dichotomy: that between the state and civil society and one of a "social-personal" distinction. When combined, these create a tri-partite division of social relations: the state, the civil society, and the personal. Evidently, the state is always considered public, and the personal is taken as private. However, the status of the civil society is ambiguous as it is private when opposed to the state, and public when contrasted with the personal.[87]

In contrast, when assigning the domestic sphere to any of the aforementioned liberal distinctions of public-private, feminist theorists point out that neither of the above-mentioned liberal distinctions "explicitly invokes the family (which cannot be assumed to be synonymous with the personal sphere of intimacy)".[88] This is problematized by feminists as they point out that men and women live "different manifestations of the dichotomy",[89] where men view the domestic sphere as a sphere of personal privacy, women experience it as a "sphere of constraint and oppression".

Thus, they draw their own distinction of the public-private spheres: one which considers civil society, government, political deliberation and practice of citizenship (*polis*) as public. And defines the private sphere "institutionally as the relations and activities of domestic life".[90] This feminist public-private distinction becomes essential to my own analysis of the two waves of feminist activists and their activities, as I further discuss in the chapters that follow.

[86] Judith Squires, "Public and Private," in *Political Concepts,* ed. Richard Bellamy and Andrew Mason (Manchester University Press, 2003), 131, https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt155jbcx.15.
[87] Squires, 132.
[88] Squires, 132.
[89] Squires, 136.
[90] Squires, 132.

Chapter 3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

Since this research project aims to understand generational patterns in women's rights activism in Pakistan, I selected the activist groups from different age brackets to be the focus of my research. Having lived in Lahore for the past ten years, I chose it as my field site; this also determined my choice of studying urban collectives only, as that also acted as a means to limit my study to a realistic, manageable scope commensurate with an MA thesis.

The Women's Action Forum (WAF) was therefore an obvious choice, being an older collective of urban women. The choice of the younger group, Girls@Dhabas (G@D), was also straightforward as it focuses primarily on urban women, and because I was familiar with it from before. My choice of group selection in Lahore specifically was therefore shaped by my familiarity with these groups and access to them through previously made connections. As I detailed in the introduction chapter, it was my professional association with SG through which I happened to discover WAF in 2016, and directly engage with them through their weekly meetings and other informal interactions. Similarly, I became aware of G@D'S work through friends and colleagues who either co-founded their Lahore chapters or frequently participated in its activities, and through regularly keeping abreast with of their activities on social media. I participated myself in some of these activities as well.[91]

I prioritised speaking to founding members as I saw them narrating both the need to have begun their collective in the first place, and its evolution ever since. With WAF, my preference was also to try and reach out to members who had both founded the collective, but had also later proceeded to found their respective women's rights NGOs, as that would provide an insight into how WAF's activism changed course following Zia's death in 1988 and the subsequent institutionalisation of the women's movement in Pakistan, as discussed earlier in the introduction.

As described above, choosing Lahore as my field site was a conscious choice and I did 'find comfort' in the thought of returning to and engaging with a community that I was a part of and thus familiar with already. Planning for fieldwork was therefore done with the confident assumption that prior familiarity with the community would entail easier access to activists and

[91] In 2016 and 2017 respectively, I participated in a bike rally organized by G@D to advocate for women's access to public spaces and in a study circle that was convened to talk about difficulties with open conversations around sexuality in our society.

greater success in getting interviews done as compared to any other location in Pakistan.[92] Another assumption was also that the activists would be available and interested themselves in participating in the study.

I contacted interviewees through email and social media; since WAF does not have a centralized email address, and because its activity on social media was minimal, I reached out to WAFers individually over email, explaining the background, motivation and preliminary aims of my research, requesting interview appointments. With G@D, however, I assumed that a consensus would have to be reached by the collective members before any agreement on participating in the study, therefore my first attempt was to reach out over its Facebook account, assuming that due to regular activity on their social media pages, responses would be quick and a notification would go to all members collectively about my interest in including them in the study.

Getting interviews and coordinating appointments was a slow, tedious process and required consistent efforts, consuming both time and energy. Following repeated failed attempts at getting in touch, I started personally reaching out to activists, both over text messages and in person by attending their events.

As most of the interviewees are working women; this meant that not only was extra effort required in reaching out and coordinating back and forth for interviews, but also that they could be scheduled only during or late after work hours. The locations for most of the interviews were therefore work places or coffee houses, while interviews conducted after returning to Budapest were all on either Skype or WhatsApp audio calls; once scheduled, however, all interviewees were thoroughly generous with their time. However, adjustments to schedule and time restrictions entailed much longer initial interviews than planned, given the potential inability to schedule a follow up interview.[93] Another consequence of limited timings was also that some WAF interviews took on a more structured form as compared to other oral history interviews which were more free flowing/organic.

Post fieldwork in Budapest, I also happened to touch base with two other students, Ifra Asad and Mackenzie Nelson from the School of Public Policy at CEU, making a documentary on women's rights activism around access to public spaces in Muslim societies, their focus

[92] Dillard quoted in Binaya Subedi, "Theorizing a 'Halfie' Researcher's Identity in Transnational Fieldwork," *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education* 19, no. 5 (September 2006): 578, https://doi.org/10.1080/09518390600886353.
[93] The initial interviews would often last as long as two hours, often becoming an exhausting experience for both the interviewee and myself.

being Pakistan. Part of their research was on the dynamic between the two generations of urban women's collectives, where they chose to compare WAF and G@D as well.

I assisted in drafting structured questionnaires and conducting Skype interviews of WAFers with them for their documentary.[94]

3.2 Methods

I used semi-structured questionnaires for all my interviews, mostly relying on the course that the conversation with each activist took on its own. In addition, I had initially wanted to conduct participant observation as well, assuming that, the research participants would allow me to do so given the ongoing activities of these collectives happening during my fieldwork. However, this could not come about as I was unable to acquire permission to attend weekly WAF meetings and G@D's activities were relatively slow-paced during the summer, as was repeatedly mentioned during interviews. Apart from interviews and incorporating secondary literature, data also includes that collected from reviewing the social media activities of these collectives on platforms like Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.

At some points, I encountered objections regarding the use of oral history, as the method was termed 'inadequate' given the primacy placed on people's memory and subjectivity. While I acknowledged these concerns, in order to address them, I responded by describing how oral histories corresponded to my motivations for pursuing this topic in the first place.

I chose this topic as a member of that community faced with a dearth of personal narratives that would provide knowledge of past women's activism to a budding generation of young feminists; therefore, I was interested in moving away from existing dominant narratives about them and understanding not just "what they did, but what they wanted to do, what they believed they were doing and what they now think they did." Thus, learn more about the "meaning" than about the "events". Rather than reconstructing facts, I wished to collect narratives that would address this sense of inaccessibility felt on part of the younger activists today.

Moreover, regarding the interview exercise itself, I was also cognizant of the mutual relationship that shapes the information shared during any oral history interview; my first priority was to leave conversations as unstructured as I could, giving preference to anything and in whichever order the respondents wished to share their stories. However, for the sake of

[94] The terms of our collaboration included sharing our respective interviews with each other (after acquiring consent of the WAFers involved); and me assisting in coordination of interview appointments and acquiring any archival material required for the documentary subsequently. These interviews have been cited everywhere they have been quoted in this thesis.

some sense of direction and coherence in the interview, I chose to proceed by periodizing WAF's work over decades from 1980s onwards. The next section more elaborately details on how my positionality may have shaped their responses to some of the questions I asked during the interviews.

While I kept the first few conversations general and unstructured, I would identify missing pieces and follow up on them during subsequent interviews whenever they were possible to schedule. Post field-work, I transcribed the interviews verbatim, thematising them as I went along and then following up to make connections between those themes that constitute the various sections of this thesis. All quotes from activists are from my conversations with them, with the exception of the interviews done for the documentary (mentioned above), and quotes from any published literature by/about them, in which case, all sources are referenced.

3.3 Positionality, Power and Ethics

Barring the difficulties of scheduling interviews, my knowledge of the community ensured easy access to them in the sense that I knew beforehand who to speak to, and how best to get in touch with them. However, I believe that I embodied a "halfie"[95] status during fieldwork, where I kept switching between an insider status and that of an outsider, depending on which collective I was speaking to, and the specific members I interviewed.

For instance, the ease in rapport building with G@D members was markedly different than in my conversations with the WAFers. The ways in which the former articulated their understanding of activism for women's rights today, the problems identified and their current and potential responses to them were underscored by an implicit ease made possible by an overlap between our respective backgrounds otherwise: socio-economic, and education levels for instance. Moreover, when discussing their interactions with WAF, experiences were shared with the implicit understanding that I was familiar with those dynamics already – and I was, given that some of the recounted instances had happened while I was still directly involved with both these collectives before moving away for graduate studies.

In contrast, my status while speaking to WAFers, in some conversations more than others, was oftentimes that of an outsider, where I was seen as part of the younger generation of activists; responses often contained the phrase "your generation" while reflecting on G@D's work, or their dynamic with them. Oftentimes, WAF members would perceive some of my questions as accusatory which, in fact, reflects the overarching disconnect between the two

[95] Subedi, "Theorizing a 'Halfie' Researcher's Identity in Transnational Fieldwork."

groups of activists. It was this concern of not wanting to put WAFers on a defensive that, except when explaining the background of the research project, and points where the conversation would specifically demand me to share that information, I chose to remain unforthcoming about my personal involvement with G@D. Done so in order to earnestly convey that my position was neutral and my intention with the project was one to understand and learn, and not to put them on a spot about their work.

My outsider status therefore was accounted for by differences due to age and seniority, which ultimately impacted the power relationship in most conversations, too – there were multiple points when I was instructed to either read up more on WAF's history, alter my methodology or the questions I asked would be turned around and asked of me.

To avoid sensitive moments like these during interviews, I took considerable time at the beginning of each interview, describing the background of the project and the conditions in which my interest developed to pursue it. I would also declare my position in the beginning as that of a researcher wishing to understand the work of the two groups of activists and my desire to put them in conversation; at points where a question was misconstrued, I would pause, and take a step back, taking time to repeat the question and elaborating on its meaning again, emphasising that my intentions were just inquisitive and not accusatory. It is in line with the sensitive nature of this project that I have chosen to anonymise responses, particularly in chapter 6, where members of each groups share their perspective of the other group.

Apart from "additional persuasion/instruction" to convey my motivation and meanings, at various points my legitimacy as a "halfie" researcher was also reinforced or potentially measured against what and how, as a younger activist, I intended to present and whether I would use the data collected to contribute to women's rights activism in Pakistan, giving me the impression that not engaging with the material beyond the scope of an academic project made my intentions behind it seem superficial.

Alongside these expectations, other factors also intensify the sensitivity of my responsibility of representing both generations' narratives; Abu Lughod states of "halfie" researchers, that they are faced with multiple audiences which receive and hold accountable the researchers for their eventual representation;[96] given my age, I am representing the narratives of the older generation, especially when the project has emanated out of a need to fill the communication gap between the two generations and engage with sensitive issues of

[96] Lila Abu-Lughod, "Writing Against Culture," ed. R Fox (Santa Fe: School of American Research Press, 1991), 142. As cited in Subedi, "Theorizing a 'Halfie' Researcher's Identity in Transnational Fieldwork," 573–74.

intergenerational rifts. Similarly, given my position of a graduate student from Pakistan in a Western educational institution, I believe that Abu-Lughod's words of representing the self when representing the Other ring true in my case.[97]

3.4 Limitations

As mentioned above, I limited my research only to urban women's collectives in one city based on what was realistically possible for me to cover in the time that I had, and the scope of this project. This ultimately left out other active women's collectives that have also been active for years – those that are women wings of political parties and those active at the grassroots for instance, thus bringing in nuances of class dynamics, rural-urban features and overarching political interests in partisan politics to light. An intergenerational analysis of their work would provide valuable insights into how conditions around their work have evolved over the years and also what their interactions, if any, with urban collectives like WAF and G@D have been like.

Lastly, with regards to the methods chosen, Alessandro Portelli aptly points out the "unfinishedness" and "incompleteness" of oral sources, describing how oral narratives are either never the same twice, and how is it never possible to completely exhaust the memories of all those involved in the research.[98] While the strengths of oral history entail subjective, personalised, detailed accounts of history, their inclusion/exclusion is a double-edged sword as the nature of oral sources makes historical work incorporating them inherently unfinished while their exclusion would leave the historical project "incomplete by definition."[99]

[97] Abu-Lughod, "Writing Against Culture," 142.
[98] Alessandro Portelli, "What Makes Oral History Different," in *Oral History, Oral Culture, and Italian Americans*, ed. Luisa Del Giudice, Italian and Italian American Studies (New York: Palgrave Macmillan US, 2009), 55, https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230101395_2. See also Anna Green, "Individual Remembering and 'Collective Memory': Theoretical Presuppositions and Contemporary Debates," *Oral History* 32, no. 2, (2004): 43–44.
[99] Portelli, "What Makes Oral History Different," 40.

Chapter 4: WAF and the Longstanding Fight for Women's Rights: Recounting the Past in the Present

4.1 Introduction

Closing the door behind me, I set the audio recorder on the table. Sitting across from me was Neelam Hussain, Executive Coordinator of Simorgh - Women's Resource & Publication Centre,[100] and a prominent member of WAF Lahore. Following multiple attempts at scheduling, we had finally managed to find some time to meet at her office; I asked her to begin by describing her personal involvement with the women's movement.

"My personal involvement begins with childhood", she said, and then went on to describe how her inclusion in the women's resistance during Zia's regime was "a given", "a natural progression" in life, and an eventual outcome of her personal experiences until that point. Her narration afterwards is of a set of life events of her being constantly subjected to normative gender roles and norms.

Born in an otherwise progressive, politically left-oriented household, she reminisces noticing patterns of a latent family culture where her male cousins (of the same age or younger), enjoyed freedoms - of mobility and attire – that were "almost taken as a right". The same liberties were not always afforded to the women. Not being able to fully comprehend her observations as a child, Hussain says, her reaction at the time was not one of protest, but "of a desire not to be like the mother and the [female] cousins, but like my uncle, because they [the male family members] were having much more fun."

However, the discriminatory nature of the gendered roles and norms around her only reaffirmed itself over time as she bore consequences of her gendered experiences as a woman; these experiences brewed a sense of injustice within her, along with resentments for the societal order. She recalls being a woman of marriageable age dealing with the pressures to get married; having to forego a scholarship offer at Cambridge University because of that pressure ("I still regret it, I wish I hadn't"); having an employment offer rescinded - for concerns of an impending maternity leave - after she revealed to the employer that she was pregnant ("I wish I hadn't told her").

Equally importantly, Hussain also points out how her political consciousness in her formative years was rooted in literature, which she described as "a great entry point into the world beyond one's experiences". Now a renowned literature academic in Lahore, she

[100] Simorgh - Women's Resource & Publication Centre was formed in 1995 and is one of the leading women's organizations mentioned in the preceding chapters.

remembers being an avid reader; and how she became aware of the scholarship that poured in about the Second Wave of Feminism from the West at the time. Nothing short of a revelation for her, it made sense of and gave language to her thoughts and politics: "what feminist theory did, was to systematize intellectually my questions, my resentments, my resistances, and my sense of injustice". Alongside, Hussain remembers, conversations about any ongoing significant political events were a regular feature at her household, and she subconsciously "imbibed" them without actively partaking in them at the time. Anti-government protests against the then military dictator Ayub Khan was one such example that she mentioned.

WAF Lahore (WAF LHR) founding member Nighat Khan, however, recalled actively participating in street protests against Ayub Khan as a young student; she mentions that even though her father was a military officer himself, there was no conflict with her parents over her political choices - her right to exercise them were respected as long as she bore any resultant consequences herself. She traces her sensitisation to social and political issues back to the Convent of Jesus and Mary (CJM), her childhood school, which was also attended by other women who later became WAF LHR) colleagues (Hussain had also fondly remembered the school as a place where "lifelong friendships began", including those with women who later either founded or joined WAF LHR).

Khan describes that the school instilled in them a sense of responsibility of giving back to society and being mindful of their own privileges. Emphasizing her sensitivity to the realities of marginalization and poverty, Khan continues by describing how her lifestyle underwent a sharp transformation after her father retired from the army. Stripped of all privileges, her family moved to the US, where she enrolled in Columbia University and self-financed her education by simultaneously working in the poverty-stricken Lower East Side in New York City (NYC); she remembers taking Marxism courses at school. All this while, Khan was also a witness to rapid social movement activity in the US at the time, recalling the ongoing anti-Vietnam war movement, the feminist movement and the gay rights movement. She particularly recalls being a student at Columbia in 1968; this was in reference to that year's mass protests against the university administration for its encroachment on public land in adjacent Harlem, and its association with the Institute for Defense Analyses, IDA - a research group working with the Department of Defense – in the wake of the anti-Vietnam war protests.[101] "I was involved in that, in '68, I was in Columbia which was the forefront of struggle in America!"

[101] Erin Blakemore, "How Columbia's Student Uprising of 1968 Was Sparked by a Segregated Gym," HISTORY, accessed June 9, 2020, https://www.history.com/news/columbia-university-protest-occupation-1968.

These experiences left a lasting impression on Khan and her political outlooks; the rest of her family opted to eventually settle in the US – describing them as "American", she distinguishes herself by declaring, "I was the one who decided that I am going back - going back for politics, for the revolution…I came back decidedly to be involved in politics." Once in Pakistan, she wilfully gave up her rights of residence in the UK and the US, and worked in academia with a research focus on rural poverty,[102] also engaging off-and-on with left-oriented activist circles around her. She then left to pursue postgraduate studies at the University of Manchester in 1979, and returned for her fieldwork in 1981 only to find herself amidst the onslaught of attacks on women's rights and liberties by the Zia regime.

Once in Lahore, however, she recalls finding "no women's groups and feminist groups", and being "very frustrated" at the lack of politically like-minded women her.

> "I had some personal friends who were feminists - but there were very few of us; four maybe, I can count them, who read the same thing and reacted the same way….I remember Farida Shaheed came back from abroad and ask[ed] who are the women's groups [here] and I said, 'Farida, there aren't any.'"

Shaheed, co-founder WAF LHR, with an educational background in Sociology from the Université de Genève and later the University of Leeds, had returned to Pakistan just in time to see Zia overthrow the government in the late '70s. She started working as a researcher at the Punjab University (PU) in Lahore but recalls resigning in protest soon after, as her articles would return with a not-fit-for-publication result: this was amidst harassment by the government which declared the institute as "the hub of anti-national, Indian and Russian propaganda" as part of its overall pattern of crackdown on dissent and academic freedom in the country.

Regarding a dearth of women's groups, Shaheed echoes Khan's frustrations: upon arrival in Pakistan, she had repeatedly attempted to get women together informally to form a

[102] The first was her involvement in an in-depth project on poverty and social participation in development, carried out jointly by the QAU department of economics and the social development division of UNESCAP, Bangkok, in 1976. The project's main researchers included, besides Nigar Ahmad, Aly Ercelawn and Nighat Said Khan (aka Bunny) and me. While Ercelawn concentrated on data collection, processing and training, Ahmad and Saeed were involved in the in-depth study of inter and intra-household social and economic relationships by residing in selected houses for extended periods and revisiting them multiple times. "In Memory of Nigar," accessed June 9, 2020, https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/190019-In-memory-of-Nigar. "It was initially meant for research but slowly spread out to other areas," said Nighat. "It started out after a three year project in villages led to an understanding of the women in rural areas and the need for them to be in leadership roles and to have economic empowerment." Xari Jalil, "Nigar Ahmed Passes Away," *Dawn.Com*, February 25, 2017, https://www.dawn.com/news/1316862. While the first issue appeared in 1978 (i.e. almost a year after the Bhutto period ended), it was actually the result of work and thinking begun in that period. The group's work in they community was a product of that period and had been generated by the political environment of that time. Mumtaz and Shaheed, *Women of Pakistan*.

group, reiterating that she was always interested in women's rights. However, she failed to do so as "no one had the time for me back then", she recalls. Subsequently, both activists associated themselves, instead, with the new women's groups that had surfaced in the '70s. Following her resignation at PU, Shaheed moved to Karachi and immediately got involved with Shirkat Gah – Women's Resource Centre (SG), formed in the wake of the 1975 World Conference on Women in Mexico, while another collective, Aurat (Urdu for woman), was an outcome of the above-mentioned extensive research study that Khan conducted in the mid-70s, along with other politically left-oriented academics.[103]

It would be misplaced to take Shaheed and Khan's frustrations as suggesting a complete absence of women's groups at the time - as the introduction chapter detailed earlier, post-Indian independence in '47, several women's groups were active off and on in Pakistan.

Instead, their statements underscore a sense of discontentment that can be attributed to an ideological void that the two felt between their political outlooks and those of the existing women's groups. This can be understood better in light of how these activists distinguished between the old and the new women's groups.

In her book *Women of Pakistan – Two Steps Forward, One Step Back* that she co-authored with Khawar Mumtaz, another founding member of WAF LHR, she remarks how there was dissatisfaction amongst the founders of the new women's groups as "ideas of liberation and feminism were almost non-existent" amongst the already existing women's collectives.[104] Thus, terming the new groups as being "radically different", the authors highlight the emergence of a "feminist consciousness" espoused by each one of them.[105]

Exemplifying the "feminist consciousness" of these groups were their goals, strategies of engagement and organisational principles. The authors' description of the groups having "a distinct women's point of view", and to "isolate, identify and create an awareness of the women's issue" point to the centrality placed on women's experiences, thus, engaging with women as a distinct group, a "sex-class".[106] The new collectives aimed to raise self-awareness amongst women about their gendered experiences, to identify "historical reasons for women's servile position" in society,[107] politicise them regarding their double oppression "and the struggle, not only of class, but also that of throwing away the yoke of male domination"; consciousness-raising was adopted as a method of engagement with women for the first time,

[103] Jalil, "Nigar Ahmed Passes Away."
[104] Mumtaz and Shaheed, *Women of Pakistan*, 62.
[105] Mumtaz and Shaheed, 65.
[106] Chafetz, *Handbook of the Sociology of Gender*, 156.
[107] Mumtaz and Shaheed, *Women of Pakistan*, 56.

as the collectives strove to become awareness raising, women's resource centres that conducted and disseminated research on women's lived realities, collected information on their constitutional rights, resources for essential legal and medical services, and logistical assistance to working women. Structurally, non-hierarchical organizational forms were also pioneered by the new women's collectives.[108]

The efforts of these collectives to politicize women's personal, individual experiences, and raise awareness about their subjugation as being a consequence of structural gender inequality - along with the specific methods employed to do so - resemble the ideology and methods of the radical feminists in the US at the time; radical feminists also identified patriarchy as an omnipresent socio-cultural and structural reality that sustained "male domination" (mentioned above as well) over women in society. Gendered identity is understood to be the primary basis of women's oppression and inequality, as the resultant sexual division of labor ensures male dominance and women's subjugation in both the domestic sphere and public spheres of political and economic institutions; heterosexuality, the institution of marriage, reproductive responsibilities on women and the family unit are highly critiqued constituents of the consequent systemic inequality.[109]

The sense of discontentment felt by Khan and Shaheed, the ideological disconnects felt that eventually drove the formation of their own collectives is reflective of how these activists shared a collective identity that did not resonate with the women's groups that existed before. This collective identity, as the above discussion demonstrated, was a result of an interplay between factors like them navigating their personal life experiences, their education, and the political events of the time that they were exposed to that helped give meaning to their lives. Coupled with the endless attacks on their rights by the Zia regime, this brought them together in a political generation that galvanised to collectively tackle the threat. However, as the next section will show, while the activists' ideological leanings may be clear to them, the importance of factoring in the community environment becomes imperative to understand the extent to which they can enact their ideology into political practice.

[108]To this end it was to carry out 'consciousness-raising' and research on women, provide legal and medical assistance, act as a 'pressure group to safeguard the rights of working women' and bring out publications. It was also conceived as a reference agency and consultancy, to keep directories of women who needed accommodation, day-care centres or jobs, and of working women who could work as 'consultants' to the centre and future working women.Mumtaz and Shaheed, 67.

[109] Chafetz, *Handbook of the Sociology of Gender*, 165. See also James W. McAuley, *An Introduction to Politics, State and Society* (London ; Thousand Oaks, Calif: Sage Publications, 2003), 60.

4.2 Women's Question on the Agenda: The Scope and Limits of Action

The importance of viewing WAF's work in context of the surrounding social, cultural and political community environment that Reger talks about - how it facilitates and/or limits the scope of action – becomes evident when it is seen that despite having the ideological clarity about the need to eliminate patriarchy to further women's rights, WAFers like Mumtaz and Shaheed were faced with a choice about whether to choose a transformative, revolutionary agenda or one with reformist goals in mind. In line with the discussion above, this question pertained to the choice between "a pure feminist movement" or a "broader-based women's movement",[110] as according to them, those advocating for the former would "tend to favour working independently" while the ones in favour of the latter "are more prone to see the question in the light of the general political situation".[111]

While, in theory, WAF's activism was premised on its opposition to patriarchy, the extent to which the collective was able to enact its feminist values in its activism was determined by several factors, most notably, the ideological and cultural barriers between the handful of WAF members and the women at large whom it meant to involve in its struggle. While core WAF members, with their educational and social background and exposure to the international women's movement abroad were acquainted with concepts like patriarchy and held radical desires to question and weaken it, women at large in the urban regions of Lahore were not quite there yet, as Mumtaz commented,

> "[It was] a process of discovering for a lot of women, who called themselves activists, women's rights activists, but were hesitant to call themselves feminists. Women's Action Forum called itself feminists, Shirkat Gah called itself feminist. The point is that a lot of the other people were hesitant about it."

The hesitation that Mumtaz refers to above was fuelled in part by the ways in which the far right factions would denounce women who attempted to subvert cultural norms at the time; she continues by recalling some of the phrases that were associated with these resisting women: "free of all principles, women who want free sex…living with men, breaking homes"; WAF was hence caught in a bind, as their attempts to question the various cultural manifestations of patriarchy was blockaded by the need to also work within what Mumtaz and Shaheed call "the cultural reality" and the "cultural parameters" of society.[112] This need was reinforced by the surrounding socio-cultural environment that WAF operated in. Mumtaz and Shaheed note that

[110] Mumtaz and Shaheed, *Women of Pakistan*, 149.
[111] Mumtaz and Shaheed, 150.
[112] Mumtaz and Shaheed, *Two Steps Forward*, 1987, 158

the demeanour and conduct of the activism of each WAF chapter was based on its priorities for action and the surrounding environment that it operated in, and that the socio-cultural environment in Lahore made the collective "compromise on a purely feminist line" sometimes.[1] Public, visible street agitation was one of the core modes of WAF Lahore's resistance in the 1980s, and it therefore relied considerably on the numerical strength that it could amass to register visible opposition and protest against the military dictatorship, especially when similar protests from other members and organizations of the civil society were nearly non-existent.[1]

The ideological boundaries, constituent of a collective identity, between the handful of WAFers and the women at large are echoed further by Shaheed who shared that while there were several avenues of exposure to feminist thinking available to core WAF members, the ideological disparity between them and the women at large meant that WAF would sometimes be compelled to temper its ideological leanings to not disturb the "middle class sensibilities"[113] of its constituents in order to amass as strong a support as possible,

> "We used to often say 'We wish we could execute a feminist agenda but WAF is a women's rights movement and we need the widest support'; the concepts were there, whatever books there were at the time had been read, so it's not like we were not aware especially the academics, coming from academic backgrounds, all of the feminists had either been part of the movements of the '60s, '70s, we were still engaged at an individual level with a number of the collectives…the bookstores; we just didn't make it the overall agenda of WAF at that time because we didn't think that it would attract that many people. As I said, we had a number of discussions where we said that 'ideally things should be this way, but at this point there's martial law and we need to get the largest number of people on board.'"

One example of the group having to forego their ideal course of action in context of the surrounding community environment, as Shaheed mentions above, can be seen in WAF's self-censorship around issues that were discussed within the collective, but never openly in the public.

Shaheed recounts having "heated debates" within WAF about the sex wars[114] around sex workers that "never spilled out into the public"; similarly, Khan reminisced that "we had a session once on sexuality and violence within the marriage where we had women of different classes [present] including ourselves, that never happened again". Saigol reiterates this pattern

[113] Saigol, "Feminism and the Women's Movement in Pakistan: Actors, Debates and Strategies," 19.

[114] This reference to feminist "sex wars" refers to "debates among feminists about ways in which both sexual orientation and sexual practices can contribute to either domination or liberation."Carisa R. Showden, "Feminist Sex Wars," in *The Wiley Blackwell Encyclopedia of Gender and Sexuality Studies*, ed. Angela Wong et al. (Singapore: John Wiley & Sons, Ltd, 2016), 1, https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118663219.wbegss434.

as well, as she points out WAF's tiptoeing around these "forbidden territories" of heterosexual marriage and family which WAF did not venture into questioning, so as to not perturb "middle class morality and norms" of the culture in which it operated. Overall, the private sphere, as described earlier in the conceptual framework relating to the activities and relations of domestic life, was not problematized openly at all.

4.3 Activism in the Public: Retaining the Political, Losing the Personal

As discussed briefly in the Introduction, a prominent characteristic of WAF's activism during the decade that followed Martial Law, was the complementary relationship between its work and the women's rights NGOs in Lahore, several of them headed by WAF members themselves. In fact, going forward from an era that was marked by widespread repression of civil society, one of the points of WAF's renewed agenda was to use the emerging organizational platforms to its benefit and now ensure the "infusing of women's rights into the development sector."[115] While the historiography lists the contributions of these organizational bases to advance women's rights, the efficacy of the work done by women's rights NGOs, with their massive inflows of donor funding and much larger outreach capabilities is a much-debated subject; however, it is equally important to look in detail into the impact, if any, that the changed circumstances had, on WAF as an autonomous, urban women's collective, and its activism.

In line with its goal to generate change on a national level, another distinct characteristic that came to be the mainstay of WAF's activism in the years to follow was its reaction to and activism around public issues (legislation, anti-militarisation, anti-nuclearization to name a few) which, in turn dictated the avenues that WAF mobilized in that included state-bodies and actors; these public avenues reinforced a breakdown of a personal connection between WAFers and the women at large.

Following the lifting of Martial Law, means of communicating with the public changed with the resumption of regular communication media and a redistribution of time and energy of the activists who now had full time commitments to their organizations, which left little time for voluntary mobilizing activities. Khan states that the nature of issues that WAF campaigned for diversified, however, instances of connecting their work with women aimed at roping them in the struggles reduced; the resistance, although political, thus lost its personal touch and panned out in the public realm only, as Khan explained:

> "Our issues became more intellectual; I mean all of the stands we were taking. They were public stands, we took a stand against blasphemy, it came on the

[115] Fleschenberg, "Military Rule, Religious Fundamentalism, Women's Empowerment and Feminism in Pakistan."

> media, but did we try and explain it to [people]? A lot of people knew about it [the Women's Bank case] because it was on the media but what were we trying to say in the Women's Bank, yes it was a Women's Bank, but did we connect with the women who were using the Women's Bank?"[116]

To understand Khan's comments here, it would be important to reiterate the understandings of the "private" and "public"; while the "private" pertained to the domestic sphere, the public refers to "civil society, government, political deliberation and practice of citizenship (*polis*)". Thus, WAF's approach is taken to be "public" for the issues that it picked up and its activism was done in the avenues of the state and civil society at large.

Not only was there a marked change in mobilization strategies which had implications for how well connected WAF was to the women whose rights it fought for, the new turn in WAF's activism with the new priorities that it entailed in WAFers' lives also impacted the group's internal dynamics and cohesion.

Of all the WAFers that I spoke to, Khan again was the most elaborate in describing the changes that she sensed in the group's own dynamics and its activism. Reminiscing about the early years of WAF, Khan nostalgically recalls how outsiders perceived WAFers to have known each other for years; "that was actually not true; [it's just that] our personal friendships became extremely important to our politics in those years." Despite not having any quick mediums of communication that are available today like phones or emails, Khan reminisces that the *jazba* (Urdu for passion) bound the group together, and in their resistance, they found fulfilment and solidarity.

> "We were completely obsessed by what we were doing, propelled a lot by anger but also an enormous excitement that we found in each other, that loneliness that we had been feeling, about the women and the military, everybody had been feeling the suffocation and now suddenly we were together."

However, Khan states that the institutionalization of the women's struggle caused the newly formed and already existing women's organisations to become 'entities unto themselves'. This entailed WAF losing its character as being a space where women could process their personal experiences through the prism of their feminist politics; professional/organizational commitments meant that the energy levels and time available for voluntary activism got divided. The meetings lost their spontaneity, now only following strict pre-set agendas and "literally we felt as if we were on a timer," as Khan put it.

[116] Nighat Said Khan, Interview with the author, August 2018

Khan's narrative above would be an apt backdrop to consider for the statements made by Khan and Kirmani earlier in the historiography; the authors had described the movement to be waning 1990s onwards, and WAF's public profile to be declining. Khan's quote provides an insider look into how that was unfolding within WAF at the time; the authors attach a sense of loss to an era of autonomous, spontaneous mobilization that existed in the 1980s. As Khan's recollections here shows, that sense of loss is shared by the WAFer herself.

4.4 Discussion and Conclusion

In this chapter, I have tried to demonstrate that WAF's actions were dictated by the ideological leanings of its members, but also considerably impacted by the surrounding environment; WAFers found themselves isolated in an environment where no women's groups existed that spoke of opposing patriarchy, and of women's liberation. This boundary of "us" and "them" existed not only between WAF and the women's collectives, but also with the women at large. Moreover, WAF sprang into action during martial law when all dissenting voices were silent, and the need to show vocal, visible, numerical strength was a necessity. This conservative environment limited its actions, and kept it from openly problematizing women's experiences in the domestic, private spheres. This period was followed by a decade in which NGOs flourished, and the best use of WAF's resources at the time was to capitalize the opportunities provided by their respective organizational bases. However, activism was done on a state/structural level that further distanced the collective from connecting personally with the women and problematizing the everyday manifestations of patriarchy in their lives. As Chapter 6 will show, this is the predominant critique of the younger activists on WAF's work as well.

However, as my findings show, this critique is levelled on WAF's work by WAFers themselves; they acknowledge falling short of questioning structures that must be questioned in struggle for women's rights. As Whittier also states, while factors like the surrounding political environment and internal personnel processes may dictate how movements may take shape, but that does not necessarily entail the willingness on an individual level of the participants to take certain courses of action.[117]

Seeing WAF's work in a community context, as Reger does, shows that WAF's actions of not doing certain things (problematizing the private sphere, engaging personally with

[117] Whittier, "Political Generations, Micro-Cohorts, and the Transformation of Social Movements," 775.

women), did not come about as a result of an ideological disagreement on doing so.[118] Instead, they were not done as the environment at the time did not allow that.

[118] Reger, *Everywhere and Nowhere*.

Chapter 5. Reclaiming Public Spaces, Reinforcing Agency: G@D and Contemporary Feminist Activism in Pakistan

5.1 Introduction

Girls at *Dhabas* (G@D) came into being in 2015 as a group of young urban women grew frustrated with the restrictions placed on their mobility and the ways in which their presence was perceived as anomalous in public spaces otherwise open for men to frequent without inhibition. The group is a manifestation of their desire to reclaim those spaces for themselves and their right to exercise their agency (in accessing public spaces, or otherwise) in the face of respectable notions of normative behaviours expected of women. My choic eof this group for my research pertains to its politicisation of personal experiences and employing tools of digital media, two prominent characteristics that distinguish it from urban feminism of the past. This chapter will look into the origins of G@D and detail its politics and modes of engagement; it will also briefly shed light on how its work, as described below, is received by WAFers in a build up to the next chapter that juxtaposes their impressions of each other in detail.

5.2 Background

I came to know about G@D in late 2015 through a colleague at work who was establishing its Lahore chapter at the time. Having gone to Mount Holyoke College with its founders who now living in Karachi, she was working on G@D's Facebook's page, partly to organize events in Lahore where people would meet to discuss issues relating to public spaces and their accessibility.

G@D had come into being out of the discomfort felt by its founders Sadia Khatri and Natasha Ansari when they would navigate public spaces in Karachi upon returning from college after completing undergraduate studies in South Hadley, Massachusetts.

In addition to living in the US for studies, Khatri also had the opportunity to spend three months in Khatmandu, Nepal; while she acknowledges that no place in the world is safe for a woman, the ways in which she was able to navigate her surroundings freely and consequently develop a relationship with those places - in terms of familiarity, sense of belonging and the ease of just being as she liked - made her realize that such an existence for a woman was possible. Karachi did not offer that experience and Khatri describes a sense of being "suffocated" upon her return,

> "[I] didn't even know the ways around here [Karachi] – in Khatmandu, I could draw a map for you…my body felt uncomfortable outside; it didn't know how to be outside"

Gradually trying to break into public spaces, Khatri would go with her friends to roadside tea stalls, *dhabas*; she fondly reminisces how every Friday at Mount Holyoke, the "desi" community would gather after Friday lunch to mingle with each other over endless cups of tea. As some women took turns brewing large amounts of hot tea, the rest bonded over subjects that ranged from politics, to sharing similar cultural backgrounds and inherent cultural challenges to Bollywood movies and more. Back home, spending time together socializing over cups of tea would emulate that experience where Khatri and her friends fondly relied on the sense of community that each other provided, made more meaningful by shared experiences of family pressures on otherwise regular things, like mobility.

The choice of *dhabas* as a location (instead of upscale restaurants or the like) pertained to a desire to move around in regular, ordinary places where they hoped to just exist as "part of the landscape". However, "they would always stand out", partly because women (particularly of Khatri's class and background) do not usually frequent these places (part of her frustrations to begin with). A budding journalist at the time, Khatri documented her *dhaba* outings with photos accompanied by text captions on her social media accounts, and happened to discuss it with a friend in Lahore, Sabahat Zakariya, who suggested making a Tumblr account to create a collection of such posts.

Zakariya had made similar attempts to navigate public spaces around her but had failed to mobilize fellow women to participate along. Recounting her experiences of engaging in online community forums for women only, Zakariya states that she was frustrated with endless debates on social media only, and the tendencies to avoid openly discussing subjects such as sexual health. In an attempt to move out of cyberspace, she suggested making an informal trip to one of the *dhabas* in a busy market in central Lahore; the suggestion was discouraged with responses that described how difficult and unfeasible it would be to pull it off. However, Zakariya went ahead on her own and did so once anyway, putting up a post on social media afterwards.

The Tumblr page went live, and neither woman anticipated the response that it would receive. Soon, submissions started flowing in from around Pakistan, India and Nepal; women described similar challenges and frustrations around navigating public spaces, and their attempts to push the boundaries by visiting dhabas for leisure and putting up their text narratives alongside their photos. Khatri says that this reaffirmed the belief that it was indeed

a shared challenge, however, experienced in isolation as women are usually socialized to adapt to challenges to their mobility, instead of problematizing them and reclaiming their right to access to public spaces. Soon the Facebook page for the collective was set up as well and since 2015, G@D has gained major traction online through its presence on and consistent engagement through all its social media platforms, now on Instagram and Twitter too.

Khatri says that one lesson that she took away from her time at Mount Holyoke and the women she met there was that the "personal is political": that at times, owing to its pervasive nature, "it is [in] our everyday [lives] that we'll be able to resist the most meaningfully". On its Facebook page, the collective describes itself as an "open community of women and non-binary folks who wish to occupy public spaces on their own terms and whims, who promote and archive their participation in public spaces, and who build community by learning from shared experiences".[119] The sections that follow will reflect on various parts of this statement, delineating G@D's politics and actions in context of what Khatri means by the "everyday".

5.3 G@D's politics: Shunning Respectability, Reclaiming the Right of Leisure

One of the core tenets of G@D's politics is the identification and subsequent rejection of notions of respectability attached to women (particularly the upper-middle and middle-class strata that the bulk of its members belong to). The collective posits that it is these notions that put normative demarcations around spaces that are then considered legitimate or otherwise for women to be present in; while having a "purpose" (until it is fulfilled) may justify a women's presence in public spaces, the concept of being in a place just for the sake of it is anomalous and thus gives rise to the second core principle of G@D's activism: loitering. The sense of being suffocated that Khatri described above emanated from being unable to loiter in Karachi - an inability to aimlessly explore its public spaces without any express purpose. Deeply ingrained societal restrictions reinforced how, for women of Khatri's background, to be in public spaces was too uncommon – and unsafe.

In contrast to women belonging to underprivileged classes who are present in public spaces out of necessity (and thus with the express purpose of earning a living), G@D likens the mobility patterns of upper and middle-class women in present day Pakistan to those of white women of the British Raj who "were shuttled from one private space to another, to

[119] Description stated on G@D's Facebook page. "Girls at Dhabas - Home," accessed June 9, 2020, https://www.facebook.com/girlsatdhabas/.

'protect' them from the local, 'native' man".[120] In the present day, the threat of the brown man on the street serves to restrict women's mobility and access to spaces still; while Khatri thinks that the fear is legitimate, she feels that it is inaccurate. Citing statistical evidence of how abuse inside the safe confines of people's homes is more prevalent and unchecked as opposed to outdoors in the public, she instead describes how these notions of respectability that "construct" fear of the unknown in the public are in fact measures to control women's sexuality:

"If I'm out on my own, I will look like someone who is in charge of their own sexual decisions"; unaccompanied by a man, Khatri says that she is then liable to be labelled a "loose woman", giving the impression of defying normative standards of behaviour that are expected to be abided by women of her background. The same could be applied to any other deviations from normative behaviour as well, be it presence in public spaces not usually frequented by women or as quotidian things like smoking in public, cycling in the streets and the like.

Another important aspect of G@D's conceptualisation of public space is how offline contexts map onto online mediums as well. As women's mobility and access to public spaces is policed in offline spaces, Khatri describes that the same is done through the vitriol spewed around on social media through trolling and intense harassment/threats if/when women register their voices and agency, as they are considered digressions from normative behaviour as well. G@D's struggle thus aims to support women in sharing their experiences (with its inherent challenges and successes) of accessing public spaces— that they are normally excluded from— in unconventional ways. It does so by attempting to build a community both in offline and online mediums, with social media a major tool that powers its attempts of generating conversations, mobilising women and collecting, sharing and archiving their lived experiences along the way.

5.3.1 Modes of Engagement

As mentioned above, social media remains the primary tool through which G@D generates awareness about its various actions or uses it for consciousness raising. As of now, it has a following of 58,350, 10,400 and 6,768 people on Facebook,[121] Instagram[122] and Twitter[123]

[120] Natasha Ansari, "Girls at Dhabas: Challenging Issues of Safety, or 'Respectability' in Urban Pakistan?," *OpenDemocracy*, April 27, 2018, https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/5050/girls-at-dhabas-safety-respectability-urban-pakistan/.

[121] "Girls at Dhabas - Home."

[122] "@girlsatdhabas • Instagram Photos and Videos," accessed June 10, 2020, https://www.instagram.com/girlsatdhabas/.

[123] "Girls at Dhabas (@girlsatdhabas) / Twitter," Twitter, accessed June 10, 2020, https://twitter.com/girlsatdhabas.

respectively and also has produced five episodes of a podcast discussing the group's activities, which are uploaded on the group page of the music sharing website, Soundcloud.[124]

Khatri states that the collective prefers not to use academic jargon or dense feminist theories to articulate its work; instead, it seeks to politicize personal experience and "reclaim public spaces through archiving personal experience". People share their stories through photographs and/or narratives that provide insights into their experiences of navigating public spaces around them - the idea behind this choice of personal experience sharing is to create a conducive environment to propel others to share theirs:

> "It's a collection of people's experiences, either through photographs or texts, that's something that you can get on board with, if somebody is becoming vulnerable, you open up and you listen, and then you also feel like you can share and listen."

Alongside maintaining an archive of personal narratives, considerable effort goes on "behind the scenes", as Zoya, another G@D member currently based in Lahore says. The collective drafts extensive statements and shares resources online on socio-political and issues of cultural importance; it does so by explaining its links to its own work with aspects of respectability, presence in public spaces, issues in mobility and the subsequent challenges. These include informational articles on feminism, blogs, and vlogs on related subjects like patriarchy, representation of women in media, the prevalence and safeguards against sexual harassment, etcetera.

In addition to its online activity, G@D has increasingly been investing efforts in conducting activities offline. Two of its modes of engagement include organizing events where women gather to occupy spaces in ways that would otherwise not happen frequently, if not altogether; this includes conducting bike rallies in busy downtown centres in major cities like Karachi, Lahore and Pakistan, organizing sports matches in public parks, late night loitering rounds around the city and the most unprecedented of all to date, meeting to sleep in parks. Most recently, G@D also organized a "Feminist Mapathon" where women from around the world registered to participate; the purpose and format of the activity was the same as is for all G@D's attempts to occupy public spaces and its documentation: to build an archive by "mapping interactions" ("experiences", "boundaries", "frustrations") with the city and "take ownership of streets" while taking them as "sites of feminist resistance and praxis". [125] Other types of activities which continue G@D's online efforts to create awareness of and generate

[124] "Girls at Dhabas," SoundCloud, accessed June 10, 2020, https://soundcloud.com/girls-at-dhabas.
[125] "#FeministMapathon – Girls at Dhabas," accessed June 9, 2020, https://girlsatdhabas.wordpress.com/feminist-mapathon/.

conversations around feminism and related subjects offline is the informal discussion circles that it conducts called "happy *churail*[126] corners" and "*behenchara*[127]corners." The former are informational, informal discussions around concepts like feminism, gender, class, consent, intersectionality and other terms that would otherwise be unfamiliar and too dense to grasp the nuances of for many; the purpose then is to converse about them in non-academic jargon and identify how such concepts manifest in our daily lives by exchanging one's experiences and learning from others'. The latter are informal discussions where individuals share experiences, identifying problematic aspects of culture pervasive in everyday lives; most recently, this included a discussion on the "*rishta* culture", colloquially referred to a range of pressures that women face to get married, underscored by ageist, sexist notions that determine their "suitability" for marriage. Apart from organizing reflective gatherings as mentioned above, G@D has also been increasingly active in organizing protests in response to instances of child sexual abuse, domestic violence and rape cases.

However, most prominently, G@D has been extremely vocal both through its online mediums and offline protests in lending support to women who have opened up about sexual harassment in their lives, termed as "Pakistan's #metoo moment."[128] In April 2018, Meesha Shafi, a renowned pop star in the music industry broke her silence over having been sexually harassed by her colleague, another top celebrity singer Ali Zafar in a tweet. A few other women shortly followed suit, recounting their own instances of experiencing Zafar's inappropriate advances. The case sent shockwaves through both online and offline channels with Shafi becoming the subject of harsh backlash and condemnation as Zafar filed a defamation suit against her. Soon a gag order placed restrictions on Shafi to speak anything about the case while it was pending in court while Zafar went about making public appearances denying Shafi's allegations and using those platforms to reiterate his innocence and Shafi's ulterior motives in blaming him. Apart from issuing extensive statements in support of Shafi on social media, G@D members also participated in protests that happened in major cities outside of cinemas where Zafar's recently released movie '*Teefa in Trouble*' was being screened. Not only for Shafi, G@D showed similar support to a woman from North Waziristan detailing her extremely distressful plight of being harassed and threatened by army personnel who told her to "prepare

[126] Urdu for "witch".
[127] Urdu for "sisterhood", a term that G@D created itself.
[128] "Pakistan's #MeToo Moment - Daily Times," accessed June 7, 2020, https://dailytimes.com.pk/231321/pakistans-metoo-moment/.

the bed and put a pillow on it" for they would spend the night if her husband did not return, after they had actually arrested her husband and taken him away.

Equally prominent are G@D's efforts in favour of some of the most controversial cases that have made headlines for months in the country now. This includes its support for the Pashtun Tahaffuz Movement (PTM), a movement that demands accountability and justice for the various atrocities committed against the Pashtun community in the country by the law enforcement agencies; it is touted as the most vocal and bravest in terms of calling out the military, an institution most revered and powerful in Pakistan, on its wrongdoings against Pashtuns, their region ravaged by militants and counter-insurgencies by the military under the guise of restoring peace in the region. G@D's support to PTM includes extensively using all its social media platforms to share knowledge sources that inform the public of the historical context of the issue, the demands of the movement and coverage of its protests that otherwise do not receive any airtime on mainstream media outlets that are prohibited from sharing any information on the matter. In addition, G@D members have also participated through their physical presence in PTM's rallies as and when they happened in their cities.

5.4 Limitations to Work: On Intersectionality, Inclusivity, and Privilege

All G@D members that I spoke to acknowledged that the collective's outreach for now does not reflect participation or representation of individuals with differing class, gender and sexual identities than those of its current members, which also often brings the charge of elitism to their activism, followed by a dismissal of its very need in the face of other pressing issues in society. According to Zoya, while G@D's composition may not reflect it, the collective is very cognizant of its identity and privilege; Kirmani, who follows G@D's work, often participating in its activities too, agrees:

> "I feel that what's happening with these new groups is that there is a lot of awareness about their own class privilege which is, in a lot of ways good, but in some ways it's also very crippling. So, they end up, kind of, afraid to do a lot of things because they're kind of over conscious about their class privilege."

This translates into G@D spatially limiting its activities to the localities where its members reside, for instance, conducting bike rallies in, or meetups in public spaces present in its proximity as opposed to in neighbourhoods of economically underprivileged communities, thus only attracting individuals belonging to similar class identities to its own. According to Zoya, the collective prefers to refrain from doing things "that we don't have the knowledge about", referring to a precautionary attitude where G@D does not wish to impose its ideas on individuals and their experiences of occupying public spaces, the nuances of which they do not

personally understand or share. It is also this limited scope and outreach of their work at the moment for which G@D members repeatedly point out that they are not a "movement" and insist that their work not be labelled as such. However, this does imply a lack of intention on their part to diversify as Zakariya describes that the group is now taking small steps to evolve; these include using Urdu along with English to describe their work on social media and inviting trans women and non-binary individuals to share their experiences of exclusion from public spaces driven by a desire to control their narrative in society.[129]

However, while G@D acknowledges the limited scope of their work and their class identity currently, they staunchly believe that it does not delegitimise the need to do it in the first place. Referring back to notions of respectability described at the beginning of this chapter, Khatri says that the restrictions placed on women to essentially control their mobility and prevent their presence in public spaces under the guise of protection are very real. Instead, owning their privilege, G@D members believe that it puts even greater responsibility on them to use it to problematize these restrictions and "challenge the way that we exist outside". While this refers to their experiences of course, it also refers to actively problematizing experiences of exclusion of individuals from other classes in public spaces.

Khatri is aware of the difference in treatment that is meted out to her in contrast to her domestic worker. While at times when she is just hanging out in *dhabas*, she recalls being approached by men who mistook her for a sex-worker; other times, she is treated with "benevolent sexism", where men seek to either extend extra favors to her or cordon her off in women-only sections in public spaces, owing to her apparent class identity.

> "I hate that when I am outside, I am either a 'madam' or 'meat' – I see that using my privilege to be outside in whatever little ways that I can push my own boundaries is a way to push at those ideas of class binaries and what do our interactions with common person on the street look like."

The same consciousness is also reflected in G@D's discussions on social media that Zoya termed are a major part of G@D's work taking up significant time and energy; in 2016, a clothing brand in Pakistan shot a video in a part of old town Lahore, inhabited predominantly by lower-middle class communities. Female models in the video, wearing the brand's latest collection, danced to a Beyoncé song in the video as the general public in the busy market, almost all men, looked on, perplexed. The dance was meant to convey notions of women's

[129] "In Focus : Girls at Dhabas—Redefining Public Spaces for Women in Pakistan," accessed June 7, 2020, https://medium.com/samata-joshi/in-focus-girls-at-dhabas-redefining-public-spaces-for-women-in-pakistan-2b6170cbbe59.

empowerment by virtue of the confidence with which the women took to the male-dominated space and danced. The video gained huge traction online, with part of the reaction praising the idea while others pointed out how bad in taste it looked, terming the dance performance as being completely tone deaf to its surroundings and the locals present, as was evident from the expressions of the onlookers.

G@D stepped in to nuance the discussion; on one hand praising the video and acknowledging it as "an expression of mobility", it pointed out how the video, by showing "pretty" women dancing while lower-class men "gawk" at them, it was 'demonising" them and reinforcing age-old notions of the latter being a threat/impediment/policing force to women's presence and behaviour; G@D pointed out how that notion is misplaced and instead the real impediments lay in controls emerging much closer to home, familiar, trusted relationships (parents, husbands, brothers). Instead, it reiterated how attempts to create inclusive spaces should aim at co-existing and not excluding/taking away from another social group's right to those spaces.[130] To reiterate, the desire to break through such class binaries constructed out of alleged fears that serve to control women's mobility, access to and presence in public spaces is what shapes the choice of *dhabas* as a location for women of a class identity who would usually only frequent upscale, gentrified public spaces.

5.5 Impact, Conclusion and Reflections

Like Shaheed who described that the motivation and desire amongst WAFers to act against the military regime had come about because of the impacts in the lives of those women and those around them, G@D members reflect on the creation of G@D in the same way. Khatri says that "It wasn't like we set off to establish Girls@Dhabas; G@D happened and fell into our lap because that is what was happening in our lives". Four years down the line, while reflecting on G@D's impact so far, Zoya opines that they are confident that their activism has definitely made a mark in cyberspace. The organic growth of all its social media platforms, hundreds of submissions that flow into their inboxes, attesting how G@D's work resonates with the struggles of their everyday lives, not just access to and presence in public space, but the mere exercise of their agency and defiance from expected normative behaviour in their everyday lives in general. She also describes one result of their work as "mainstreaming feminism", referring to how the various discussions that are generated on G@D's posts

[130] "Yesterday We Shared the Dyot Video with Our Take on It- the Video Was Taken Down," Social Media, *Girls at Dhabas* (blog), September 7, 2016, https://www.facebook.com/girlsatdhabas/posts/yesterday-we-shared-the-dyot-video-with-our-take-on-it-the-video-was-taken-down-/536516949891224/.

amongst individuals who could be using the internet from anywhere in the world creates a space of conversation regardless of whether it is a dialogue, debate or mere trolling. While those exchanges may be happening between those just commenting, there are thousands of people who view those exchanges nonetheless, thus learning and thinking as they go. Khatri describes how, oftentimes, when inundated with negative comments/trolling directed at them, other followers step in and engage with the negative comments and thus G@D becomes a bystander, having provided a space for such exchange to happen. Some followers have actually messaged G@D thanking them for how they got to improve their understanding on certain concepts due to an exchange they saw on one of the posts on the Facebook page. Kirmani has similar observations, crediting G@D for generating discussions around feminism and related concepts. However, she refrains from calling it a "movement", and chooses the word "interventions" instead, citing G@D's limited outreach and fluctuating momentum of their activities that is dependent on personal schedules and commitments of its individual members.

In my observations before beginning working on this study, which were reiterated again during my interviews with WAFers, G@D's limited outreach and excessive focus on making changes in their individual and personal lives was one of the most prominent characteristic of its work that stood out for WAFers. While acknowledging the value of making changes in their own lives, WAFers seemed unimpressed regarding the modes of G@D's engagement, particularly frequenting *dhabas,* and uploading pictures on social media. Khatri laments the inability to build alliances "inter-generationally" in Pakistan, saying that while G@D has gained acclaim and nurtured a solidarity bond with feminists internationally (from India and Nepal, for instance), its work is looked down upon by WAFers, whom G@D consider the frontrunners of feminist activism in the country. Khatri qualifies her statement that criticism arises from some corners of WAF, not all, but generally pertains to their work "not fighting the important feminist fights like education, jobs etcetera".

Comments like these reflect G@D's projected image to the WAFers and ultimately fuel the distance between groups of feminist activists in a country where the need for unity and collective action is dire, given the current state of women's rights and safety.[131] However, as the next chapter will show, impressions that impede collaboration exist both ways. I will look into them in detail, attempting to understand how they come to be and any opportunities (or

[131] "Pakistan Ranked Sixth Most Dangerous Country for Women," Daily Times, June 28, 2018, https://dailytimes.com.pk/259389/pakistan-ranked-sixth-most-dangerous-country-for-women/.

lack thereof) of introspection on them, which may make building the intergenerational alliances, that Khatri seems missing at the moment, easier.

Chapter 6: Intergenerational Solidarity: Ruptures and Progress

6.1 Introduction

As the thesis introduction describes, my motivation to pursue this topic was shaped by my engagements with both WAF and G@D and what I observed to be their knowledge of and opinions about the work of the other.

It is important to note that communication between the two groups have considerably increased and improved ever since the interviews for this study were conducted, particularly after the country wide Women's Day marches in March 2019. Members of both collectives participated and subsequently joined forces to tackle the widespread backlash that unleashed on them in the aftermath of the day. However, I believe that it is still useful to juxtapose the and explicate the understandings that members of each collective have of each other, and highlight its implications on how that impacts the state of connection between the two.

6.2 WAF's Perspectives on G@D

Out of all the WAF members that I spoke to, all of them used WhatsApp; however, only one mentioned using both Facebook and following G@D's page on it. The rest were either not on social media altogether, or did not follow G@D's page on the platforms that they used, having heard of it only in passing in their activist circles, or seen some pictures doing the rounds in the media. Their statements reflecting on G@D's attempts to occupy public spaces are reflective of the interplay between their understanding of G@D's work (or lack thereof) and their opinions about it.

Statements similar to "people of my generation think that there is huge public space available now" frequently surfaced, reflecting how the very idea of public spaces and G@D's attempts to access them were compared with the days of martial law in the '80s when women's moral policing in public was rampant[132] (see Introduction). This ultimately instilled fear for anyone thinking of venturing out in public space and there was no question of women assembling. As one WAFer said, "at that point you were asking for spaces that today are taken for granted."

While the idea to occupy public spaces was appreciated by all WAFers, there was a general sense of being unimpressed by the ways that it was being done: "sitting at *dhabas*" and "taking selfies," as several WAFers characterized it. The furore around occupying public spaces was inexplicable to them as they "had been doing that their whole lives". While one recounted

[132] A commonly narrated incident was one when a woman while visiting a bakery in an upscale residential area of Lahore was slapped by a stranger for not covering her head while out in public.

how she and a friend would be the only two women sitting at eateries during martial law and how "it never made a difference" to them, another described how she and her colleagues have been frequenting roadside eateries while on work trips all her life:

> "We're always sitting at a *dhaba*, all over the country – we're sitting wherever you can get food –sitting at a bus station, sitting at a truck shop or whatever, so I don't understand this concept of sitting at a *dhaba* – girls sitting at a *dhaba* and why it is a revolutionary act?"

In addition, the confusion around understanding the hype was also expressed by citing how women from underprivileged classes were out in the public spaces already [to earn a livelihood, referring to daily wage workers], "which doesn't mean that they're comfortable in it, but nevertheless they have to do it, and they are there." That is, not out of choice, or "to make a movement", but out of necessity.

These statements are reflective of several aspects of the understanding that WAF members have of G@D's work; the ways that they evaluate G@Ds work appear to be impacted by their own understanding of "public space", and the perceived utility of occupying it as and when it is done only by middle, upper-middle class women in their own localities. This will be demonstrated in the discussion below.

Evident in WAFers' statements is a pattern of how the idea of occupying public space (understood as referring *only* to *dhabas* by G@D) is taken to be synonymous with mere presence in those spaces, whether exemplified through WAFers' own past examples or those of underprivileged women; in other words, G@D's work is taken at face value to be only about members' experiences and only in *dhabas*. This reiterates how lack of personal communication and exchange of ideas, combined with WAFers' absence on social media and the resultant invisibility of G@D's work fosters an understanding that is devoid of its nuances.

As Chapter 2 details, G@D's concept of mobility and access to public spaces does not problematize inaccessibility to those spaces only based on prospects of mere presence in it, but the *manner* in which marginalised identities of, for instance, gender, sex and class engage in those spaces.

In an interview published 3 years ago, G@D co-founder Khatri, alongside pointing the "outrageous" gendered disproportionality in already available public spaces, emphasised the gendered manner in which behaviour plays out, particularly in spaces like *dhabas*. Building on Phadke et. al's description of space as not just a "neutral void" to be filled up but an "embodied

experience" that is "experienced viscerally through the bodies we inhabit",[133] Khatri details how men would move around comfortably, linger and socialise as they please; women, however would timidly stand on the sides, their mannerisms inhibited, waiting to get out of the open space into the safety of confined interiors of a bus or a car. WAF's inability to comprehend the hype around frequenting *dhabas* may then be answered by Khatri's elaboration that,

> "There isn't anything about sitting at a *dhaba* having *chai* [tea] that particularly screams: look at my politics. But it becomes political because public space is contentious and political; it becomes feminist because I am a woman who needs to go through a certain mental and physical effort to be in that space; it becomes art because it is playful, it focuses on the ways we create pleasure, ordinary pleasure, in the streets."[134]

Thus, evident in Khatri's statement are elements of resistance against notions of respectability that G@D advocates for women to shun, reclaiming their right to public spaces through the "mental and physical effort" required to frequent spaces that are otherwise designated inappropriate (and dangerous) for them. The aspect of pleasure is also evident here, where the kind of access and mobility that G@D advocates for is the right to do so without any express purpose. Thus, while examples of WAFers seamlessly frequenting eateries (for work or otherwise) and working-class women making use of public space for business are valid, by virtue of being purposeful they fall short of paralleling G@D's approach for they leave a blind spot in understanding one of the core tenets (the right of pleasure, loitering) of its very politics; moreover, they also overlook disparities by virtue of class difference (discussed in Chapter 5) in the experiences of underprivileged women and women sharing WAF's predominant upper-middle class identity.

One WAFer also claimed that the occupation of public spaces, as done by G@D, was nothing unusual but a mere consequence of the changing times; instead, she offered her opinion on what would be an "effective" way to reclaim public spaces. She suggests emulating the "Reclaim the Night" campaign, where women in the UK, following those in Italy and Germany, marched at night in their streets as an attempt to reclaim them, following a spate of instances of sexual violence against women and being told by the police to stay indoors at night.[135] By attempting to access spaces where they had been subjected to violence, the WAFer exaplained, the women were making a bold political statement. According to her, the politics inherent in

[133] Shilpa Phadke, Sameera Khan, and Shilpa Ranade, *Why Loiter?: Women and Risk on Mumbai Streets* (Penguin Books India, 2011), 66.
[134] Afshan Shafi, "Spotlight: Girls at Dhabas," March 24, 2016, https://www.themissingslate.com/tag/girls-at-dhabas/.
[135] "Reclaim the Night - Why Reclaim the Night?," accessed June 10, 2020, http://www.reclaimthenight.co.uk/why.html.

such an act underscored its transformative value, which, according to her, she found missing in G@D's attempts to merely be present in any public space.

Here, it would be correct to assume that this WAFer's absence on social media accounts for her lack of knowledge about a similar initiative, "Meet to Sleep", that G@D collaborated with feminist groups in India for in 2016, where groups of women were invited to gather and nap in public parks. A shift in the gendered mannerisms in occupying public space (discussed above) was the motive, by being "asleep, defenceless, trusting, not rushed, not hurried" in public parks"[136], so as to "shift the fear-based relationship"[137] that women are socialised to develop with their cities from childhood.

This example reiterates the invisibility of G@D's work to WAF due to social media; more importantly, it reveals how G@D's attempts of occupying public spaces by documenting their presence at *dhabas* (or any public space) through visual images and narratives, when taken at face value, obscure the political undertones that they share with its other campaigns like "Meet to Sleep" that are considered "effective" by this WAFer.

When discussing WAFers' impressions of G@D's work, however, it is also important to highlight elements that the former group is generously appreciative of. All WAFers acknowledged and appreciated how younger activists today openly self-identify as feminists. The WAFers contrast their approach to activism in the "public" sphere to that of the newer collectives as problematizing the "private" and "personal" spheres respectively.

Following from the discussion in the Conceptual Framework, and Chapter 1, the "public" sphere refers here to WAF's activism that engaged on the level of the state, with them striving for women's rights through public advocacy, lobbying and legislative safeguards for women. The use of the private sphere refers to, as Squires detailed, "the relations and activities of domestic life".

The problematizing of private spheres garners WAF's appreciation for it refers to the open acknowledgement and politicisation of issues that, as one WAFer said, "WAF was never able to provide the space for", such as sexuality, and the rights of sexual and gender minorities in the country (as discussed in Chapter 4).

The WAFers' use of the word "personal" above is taken as synonymous with being "individual": the politicisation of everyday realities, individually specific to each person and

[136] Andre Borges, "Hundreds Of Women Around India Are Sleeping In Parks To Reclaim Public Spaces," BuzzFeed, accessed June 10, 2020, https://www.buzzfeed.com/andreborges/hundreds-of-women-around-india-are-sleeping-in-parks-to-recl.
[137] As described by G@D in the description of the event on its Facebook page. "Meet To Sleep : Girls At Dhabas, Lahore," accessed June 10, 2020, https://www.facebook.com/events/1079654392079342/.

their life, and the process of incrementally pushing boundaries against patriarchal codes of normative behaviour expected of them; while one WAFer appreciated it to the extent that women should be allowed to strive to make changes in their lives as they pleased, another described it as "lifestyle feminism", as being feminism that is embodied in one's own life *only*. This limits its transformative potential in society, for yielding results in the life of that individual only and not bringing similar changes to other women's lives, thus, by default, being exclusive of others' concerns/realities. Thus, she questioned the "feminist leverage", as another WAFer had put it while critiquing G@D's individualistic approach along similar lines, by asking "are we making their lives better [women at large, particularly those of the underprivileged women], their spaces more friendly, or are we talking about our own spaces, in our own lives – only?"

Moreover, she critiqued such an individualistic approach for the lack of its deeper analysis of how overarching structures sustain women's oppression. She rhetorically asked how she could divorce the impact of patriarchy in her own, individual life without looking at how it runs through "every institution, every mechanism, every social formation", calling the state itself, the military and the politicisation of Islam inherently patriarchal structures and realities in Pakistan. According to her, they ought to be questioned as they ultimately determine the kind of agency that women have in this country, and G@D's apparent lack of questioning these structures was a shortcoming.

6.3 G@D's Perspectives on WAF

An evident pattern in my conversation with G@D members was the usage of words "public", "laws", "system" and "procedures" when referring to WAF's work over the years; these words refer to WAF's approach after the 1980s to focus on resistance to issues on a national level which also shaped its modes of engagement – away from a grassroots approach and towards public platforms (Chapter 4). The common perception, and the strongest grievance with WAF, therefore is that its primary focus has always been the public sphere, with problematizing the women's question on a more personal and private level not prioritized as much; moreover, the lack of focus altogether on matters such as sexuality and sex-positivity is another grievance. Again, as discussed in the prior section, the lack of focus on the "personal" refers to WAF's lack of mainstreaming its feminist politics in the everyday realities of women, and the "public sphere" refers to everything outside the domestic sphere, which was the arena that WAF predominantly worked in. This strong critique, compared with the discussion that follows, account for the distance that is sustained between the two groups.

6.3.1 Knowledge of the Past: Out of Sight, Out of Mind?

A short survey was circulated amongst G@D members to elicit their familiarity with WAF and its work over the past several decades; the questions included: the time when they first heard about WAF, and the source; any literature that they happened to come across, or looked up themselves, about WAF's work; and any events that they considered as milestones in WAF's activism.

The answers to the question about how/when they first heard about WAF featured a mix of sources, suggesting a randomness to prospects of knowing about it – they ranged from browsing the internet, news or print media covering the famous 1983 protest against the Law of Evidence, in college through reading material that referred to it or through colleagues who happened to mention it; as one respondent described how she heard about it when another (older) human rights activist mentioned it and was "too ashamed not to know what it [the WAF acronym] stood for, [and] to ask about it because it sounded so integral and important." Another G@D member described a general trend of knowledge about WAF only amongst women whose family members had been associated with WAF at some point. Another G@D member described her own experience of getting acquainted with WAF only when she worked at one of the women's organizations, headed by a WAFer.

During her interview, one WAFer, while commenting on the state of documentation of the women's history in Pakistan, described how young women, since 1993/1994 have been telling her of not knowing about WAF's work before they happened to discover it by chance. She also recounted the example of Ayesha Khan—the author of *The Women's Movement of Pakistan: Activism, Islam and Democracy* (2019)[138]—recounting her students' exclamations of utter lack of knowledge about WAF beyond the martial law era (post-1988). Like Khan's students, survey respondents (and G@D members during interviews), while enlisting WAF's milestones revealed a similar pattern, where they only suggested familiarity with WAF's history from its early years of confrontation with the state (particularly the widely-covered 1983 protest), along with brief mentions of the Hudood Ordinances that WAF managed to amend over the years.

Interesting and important to note, however, is how the WAFer above, before commenting about meagre levels of knowledge about WAF's work amongst youngsters, had

[138] Ayesha Khan, *The Women's Movement In Pakistan Activism Islam And Democracy.* (London, New York: I.B. Tauris, 2019).

just compared the state of documentation of WAF's activism to that of other active women's groups in Pakistan: she opined that documentation of the latter's history, and access to that documentation, does not exist as does for WAF's history "which is so well documented because of the attention, because of the newspapers, because of our [WAF's] own documentation", referring to the wide media coverage of the public nature of its work, the visibility that it entailed, and the vast scholarship produced by WAFers themselves (as discussed in Chapter 4). Kirmani, another academic at the Lahore University of Management Sciences (LUMS),[139] who has also written about women's rights activist groups in India and Pakistan in the past, raised a similar point: while acknowledging the tireless work of WAFers over the years, she highlighted the need to now move away from writing about WAF when documenting women's activism in Pakistan as it had been done quite sufficiently over the years.

Given the above discussion, a paradoxical situation becomes evident: despite the claims of WAFers and other academics of the extensive documentation of WAF's work, WAF only happens to be discovered by accident by younger activists, with limited knowledge of its work beyond the confrontational and politically volatile Zia era. The following section will attempt to explore why that may be the case.

6.4 Where are the Women? Understanding Patterns and Tracing the (In)accessibility to the Documented History of the Women's Movement

As discussed in Chapter 1, WAF's relentless resistance to the military regime in an environment of complete political censorship in the 1980s put it on a centre stage and the collective successfully carved its name and a repute for itself to advocate for women's rights in the country. In Shaheed's words, for its first decade of existence, WAF served as a "public face" [of the women's movement] and "something that people connected with".[140] However, as the historiography demonstrated, following 1988 with the restoration of democracy, however, political and civil society actors resumed their activities, dividing the media attention; while it continued its struggle, WAF was not the sole actor in the struggle that it had triggered in response to the military dictatorship a decade ago. The contours of the women's movement were now defined not just by WAF, which was previously considered the frontrunner of the movement; it now waged forward with the combined efforts of WAFers, the newly formed and already existing women's organizations, their allies in the civil society, and even in the parliament, where some of the women who had participated in WAF's agitations during the

[139] A private elite higher education institute in Lahore.
[140] Farida Shaheed, interview for documentary, March 2019.

1980s now held positions in the government. Interestingly, this was also pointed about by a WAFer who did agree on the plethora of scholarly documentation of the Pakistan's women's movement, as pointed out above by Kirmani and another WAFer; however, she qualified her statement by saying that while the women's movement has been documented widely, only two books till date have considerably highlighted WAF (the collective itself) and its work as their topic of analysis: the book written by WAF founding members, Shaheed and Mumtaz in 1987,[141] and the other written thirty-two years later by Ayesha Khan.[142]

Moreover, the historiography also showed how the incremental progress of the women's movement from 1990s onwards is documented through various aspects like advances made in the law, women's presence and participation in political processes, the broadening out of the women's movement to make links with other civil society members, and institutionalizing the women's and gender studies in education. Hence the progress was less visible and more subtle, occurring in incremental changes over the years, resulting in what Reger terms as contemporary feminism being "everywhere and nowhere"[143] and what Nicholson terms as an age where "gender is both flourishing and quiescent".[144]Thus, with progress occurring only latently, along with the absence of a definite "face" of the movement may give the impression that following the martial law, the women's movement had fizzled out, was unsuccessful or had "died"[145] down;. This can also be seen in G@D members' responses where the successful phases of the movement, i.e. WAF's milestones, were events recalled only from the 1980s, a period when each act of resistance was amplified multi-fold.

When discussing WAF's state-centric approach and its prospects of success, Shaheed states that the success of trying to institutionalize changes within the state is "dependent on those who make and implement policy…ironically rendering success dependent on a non-feminist (and greatly critiqued) state".[1] Since the state's openness to advance women's rights is constantly varying, the inability to bring about an ideal, visibly radical transformation in society may be mistaken as the struggle itself having failed; this is evident in G@D's critiques above, regarding WAF's primary focus of only engaging with the state. When combined and aggravated by gaps in knowledge about WAF's work and the trajectory of the women's movement in general, the shortcomings of the struggle, in particular, the inability to amass

[141] Mumtaz and Shaheed, *Women of Pakistan*.
[142] Khan, *The Women's Movement In Pakistan Activism Islam And Democracy.*
[143] Reger, *Everywhere and Nowhere*.
[144] Nicholson, "Feminism in 'Waves': Useful Metaphor or Not?," 5.
[145] Nicholson, 2.

grassroots support and the movement's NGOization/depoliticization, are amplified. The recipient of the critique is, ultimately, what once was considered to be the face of it.

This is pointed out by Nighat Khan as well in a text authored in 2002: she describes how due to their increased visibility, the movement has come to be defined only by a select few urban women's groups by the media, government and international agencies to confer legitimacy on it. Not only does it overlook the efforts of other, less visible, women's groups in the country, any perceived failure of the struggle puts WAF in a "position of constantly explaining what they are doing and why they are not doing what other movements and groups expect them to do".[146]

This is reiterated eight years later in 2010 when in an interview,[147] Khan is asked to analyse the gains and failures of the women's movement in Pakistan, and respond to the criticism of being an elite group of women, devoid of local cultural realities in Pakistan. Following these questions, the journalist, now an established academic and activist in Pakistan, asks her: "So why do you think that the [women's] movement failed to achieve anything substantial?" Here, the journalist's questions seem to reflect the popular perception that the women's movement had failed, instead of seeing its various incremental gains discussed above, and in the scholarship that WAF members and academics both reiterate has sufficiently documented over the years.

Like Khan says, factors that put urban groups like WAF in the limelight and in a representative position for the movement are the avenues available to its members, either through national and international platforms where the movement ought to be represented or through international and national publishing. As the historiography showed, several WAF members themselves, given their academic backgrounds have written extensively about various aspects of the women's movement; this includes contributions as journal articles and book chapters in both national and international publications. In addition, the women's organizations also serve as resource centres, having published extensive feminist research over the years as part of their ongoing work with communities across Pakistan.

One survey question inquired whether participants had read literature on WAF or by WAF members on the women's movement in Pakistan; responses mentioned coming across material through course readings in college; through one-off instances of reading one paper by a WAF member and finding other sources in its works cited. One respondent mentioned having

[146] Khan, "The Women's Movement Revisted: Areas of Concern for Future," 6.
[147] Ammar Ali Jan, "Woman behind the Movement: An Interview with Nighat Said Khan," South Asia Citizens Web, September 11, 2019, http://www.sacw.net/article1517.html.

read only a couple of publications, but otherwise not being in a position "to say for sure what WAF has been up to for the last four decades". While one respondent stated not having looked up literature at all on WAF, the rest mentioned having searched for it for research or leisure purposes; common accessibility options included acquiring PDF versions of texts by relying on people who would have knowledge or access to literature on the women's movement – these would be people either working in women's NGOs mentioned above or involved in activist circles themselves. Another option was visiting the NGOs themselves to read up on it where hard copies for some of the material are available and are then photocopied as per requests; while finding material online was also a common response, the inability to find much material online was most also most commonly cited as a hurdle.

When I discussed accessibility issues with one WAFer, she described it as being readily accessible as any researcher would be heartily welcomed in the NGOs; when I suggested that lack of awareness of its existence altogether as an issue, she exclaimed that the internet in today's age ruled out that possibility altogether: a simple search would produce texts or, at least, would direct researchers to these organizations to seek literature themselves. Therefore, she was "perplexed" at the lack of initiative of the younger activists to know more about the country's women's movement, citing low numbers of individuals who had come seeking it to her organization.

In my experience of looking up literature for this research, however, the internet was not of much help. Using Google Scholar, I would be directed to the names of authors most commonly cited and their most commonly cited publications; however, the results would rarely ever be exhaustive. As it turned out, the most common source of finding literature for me was co-incidentally landing on the names of publications in the works cited of literature produced on women's movements (focusing on transnational activism, or regional movements in South Asia). None of the books that have been cited here which included chapters by WAFers were available online. While books published by international authors were mostly available in CEU's library, those published by Pakistani authors were not; these books are printed locally and are commercially unavailable in Pakistan too. My options would then be to look them up in the online catalogue of the library at my alma mater, LUMS, an elite, private university in Lahore, and ask friends back home to send me scans of the relevant material. There were instances, however, where some books were not even available in the LUMS library; in one instance where I was still determined to pursue searching, I sought help from a friend who works at the British Library in London to search for a book and send me its scans.

Similar patterns of lack of knowledge and inaccessibility appear for WAF's archival material as well: one of the survey questions also asked respondents if they had ever come across any archival material on WAF - one responses mentioned reviewing online archives of (late) Lala Rukh (another WAFer) and wishing to see more with contextual background alongside to assist in understanding it better; the rest were all negative, stating no knowledge of it altogether.

My experience of being able to access WAF's archival documents while conducting fieldwork corroborates this as well; as WAF does not have an office space of its own, its documents are kept in hard copy forms in numerous thick files at the headquarters of the NGOs that are now led by WAF members. The access to these records is then on the discretion of individual WAF members' approvals. I managed to acquire copies of these records when I approached WAFers for interviews; Shaheed, the Executive Director of SG, my former employer, was very helpful and forthcoming to allow me open access to them. Therefore, I feel that my prior professional association played a part, for these records are otherwise either not known of to the larger feminist/activist community in the city or outside, nor are easily accessible for all, unless they know exactly where to go and who to speak to. Currently, WAF Lahore is planning on digitizing them and recording them with complete captions about information regarding each document. The digitization of photographs has begun;[148] one hurdle to that process, as the WAFer mentioned, is the extremely busy schedule of WAFers and their inability to both take out time to document the "institutional memory" of WAF. Organizational funds have proven to be limiting factors as well.[149]

Juxtaposing the narratives of the two sets of activists together, it is evident that a difference in approaches to activism exist. Critical comments involving the terms public and private, and personal/individual indicate differences in the meaning that older and younger feminists take of the slogan "the personal is political". As discussed in the literature review, the older second wave feminist take it to mean striving through collective action, to demand structural level changes that cause discriminatory gendered behaviours in women's lives

[148] One WAFer mentioned collaboration with the Oral History Project at The Citizens Archive of Pakistan to donate them copies of WAF's photographs which the organization will digitize and add to its archives with captions detailing information about each image

[149] ASR shut its operations as an NGO in 2010, owing to changes in donor frameworks that kept it from setting its agenda autonomously while funds available for the maintenance and running of the SG library were also impacted owing to financial constraints. Currently, SG serves in-person requests for material, has project publications from recent years and a catalogue of its past published research available online; however, its website's functionality varies over time. ASR's website has been displaying an 'under construction' notice for past several consecutive months as well, however, the organization is in the process of donating all of its resources to the library of the Government College University (GC), a public higher education institute in Lahore.

(WAF's approach), whereas the younger, third wave feminist take it to mean enacting feminism through everyday actions to strive for incremental changes in their individual lives.

But a difference in approaches is not the only factor that is at play here: accessibility issues to knowledge bases that document past activism and the invisibility of one's work due to lack of social media usage amplifies any perceived sense of differences by the activists, thus maintaining the divide in between.

Despite these factors, *all* of my interviewees from WAF and G@D expressed a desire to connect with the other. The current state of disconnection was lamented and termed "unfortunate" by several interviewees; what seemed to be missing was something that would remove the invisible barriers between two groups. That eventually happened in March 2019.

6.5 Aurat March

In March 2019, *Hum Auratain* (We the Women), an umbrella term for a group of feminist activists and gender and sexual minorities organized a women's march (Aurat March (AM)) in Karachi; feminist activists in Lahore, Islamabad, Quetta and Hyderabad followed, organizing their own marches. These included members of WAF and G@D as well. Hundreds of women walked the streets, and in a detailed manifesto, demanded economic, environmental, and reproductive justice for themselves; restorative justice and safeguards against gender-based violence, demanded rights of religious minorities, of differently abled people, and strongly denounced militarization and the resulting human rights violations (particularly in the wake of the then escalating tensions between Pakistan and neighbouring India over Kashmir), calling for peace.[150] This manifesto was widely shared online before the marches; however, what catapulted the event into national and international limelight – receiving country-wide vitriolic, relentless backlash – were the posters that were carried by the marchers during the event.

These posters used comical language, with women using jibe-like phrases to resist the various ways in which their lives are subjected to patriarchy, revealing women's repressed anger. For instance, Hussain writes that placards declaring "apna khana khud garam kar" (warm up your food yourself), and "what do I know where your socks are" aren't just about warming food and lost socks but refers to "male privilege and entitlement that take women's services for granted and see her compliance as moral imperative". For those who would consider this as

[150] "#AuratMarch2019: Manifesto [Complete Text]," Courting The Law, March 7, 2019, http://courtingthelaw.com/2019/03/07/news-events/auratmarch2019-manifesto-complete-text/.

frivolous, Hussain cites some of the numerous killings of women and girls over merely serving cold dinners to male members of their families.[151]

However, taking the posters on face value, the women were denounced as "shameless", "un-Islamic", a threat to Pakistani values of culture and the institution of family.[152] A resolution was passed in one of the provincial assemblies condemning the marches and FIRs were registered against the organizers in Lahore.[153] The marches provoked backlash this year as well, with the days leading up to March 8th filled with highly charged debates between feminist activists and the opponents of the march who belonged to a range of sectors: media, politicians, TV and film industry. After a renowned director, popular for misogynistic portrayals of women in his TV serials, got into an ugly spat with a feminist activist, heavily abusing her on live television over a slogan "*mera jism meri marzi"* (my body, my choice), the controversy around feminism, patriarchy and the women's marches flared up even more, making them household subjects of discussion.

This caused feminist activists across town to spring into action to defend their rights: in April 2019, I spoke to a G@D member in a follow up interview after the march, as she was a part of the organizing committee as well; she described how a meeting of all organizers took place to strategize a response to the nation-wide backlash, and spoke extremely highly of WAF members who assisted in navigating matters with the police in response to the registered FIRs against the younger activists. Moreover, in response to the resolution in the legislative assembly, feminist activists put out a call for women to state their reasons (in Urdu) for marching and the injustices that prompt their support for the AM online, sharing them with hashtag #iamamarcher. The purpose was to collect evidentiary support, and reinforce the need for the women's marches in the country, and present them to a former WAFer, Sherry Rehman, now a senior politician to fight for feminist activists' case against patriarchal forces in the state bodies.

Having learnt from the previous year, the AM organizers were well prepared and tackled the backlash on all fronts. In numerous heart-warming instances of solidarity, older and younger activists stood their ground, and demanded their rights with resilience. The organizing committee included individual members of both WAF and G@D, amongst a host of other

[151] Neelum Hussain, "Pakistan: Aurat March and Its Discontents | Neelum Hussain," *South Asia Citizens Web*, March 24, 2019, http://www.sacw.net/article14046.html.
[152] Zeenat Khan, "Spike in Online Harassment against Women Post-Aurat March," *Hamara Internet* (blog), March 29, 2019, https://hamarainternet.org/spike-in-online-harassment-against-women-post-aurat-march/.
[153] Arif Hayat | Ali Akbar, "KP Assembly Unanimously Passes Resolution against Aurat March, Terming It 'Shameful,'" *DAWN.COM*, March 20, 2019, https://www.dawn.com/news/1470834.

activists; in a pre-march press conference, an angry reporter asked the committee if they stood by the slogan of "*mera jism, meri marzi*". Instead of an articulate response which is otherwise the norm when engaging in such press conferences, the organizers, old and young, paused momentarily and then broke in a loud chorus of "*mera jism, meri marzi"*, thumping their desks and smiling at each other in jubilation, indicating their bold ownership and endorsement of the slogan, and hence, the demand for bodily autonomy. Engaging in endless debates on social media and television, WAFers and younger activists openly discussed concepts of feminism, nullifying popular misconceptions about it.

The urgent, instinctive response of the older and younger activists to collaborate in order to battle the fierce backlash removed previously existing communication barriers, and provided an impetus for even more collaborations to take place. Apart from assisting with the FIRs, WAF Lahore organized events in the wake of the AM, providing a space for all feminist activists to gather, much like the evening described in the Introduction chapter earlier. One of these included a conference in April 2019; calling the AM a "watershed moment" that "brought together various strands of the [women's] movement into an intergenerational celebration of feminism", were meant to collectively reflect and move forward in a sustained movement that brings together the personal and the political". The other event was a celebration of the Pakistan's women's day (February 12th) in 2020 which, having failed to come about in 2017, was now hosted collectively by WAF, G@D and other feminist collectives in town. Promising instances of connecting with a rich history of feminist resistance have also been made: apart from individual social media posts,[154] most importantly, ASR Resource Centre, headed by Nighat Khan, curated an event exhibiting past feminist scholarship, archival documents, artistic works produced by feminist activists in the past.[155]

These events resemble Reger's observations; generational relations between any community are dependent on the community contexts. These context shape activist strategies but also the boundaries between generations, where the demarcations of "us" and "them" are

[154] Several posts on social media circulated past and present images of WAFers protesting in the streets in the 1980s, and the women protesting now at the AMs, making connections between the similar struggles in different times, and paying homage to the older activists; another post was made by Ammar Ali Jan, mentioned earlier in the chapter as well, who interviewed Nighat Khan in 2010. Unlike his interview questions which referred to the women's movement to have failed, he put up his present post on Facebook as an academic, and stated that it was his responsibility to share resources and raise awareness of women scholars/feminist activists who had majorly contributed to the field of social sciences. He lists Khan and her written work as a must for students, academics and citizens in general to read.

[155] Sehr Jalil, "A Subaltern Herstory: Reclaiming Feminist Narratives at the Lahore Biennale 2020 | Encore | Thenews.Com.Pk," accessed June 9, 2020, https://www.thenews.com.pk/tns/detail/613413-a-subaltern-herstory.

fluid; in hostile environments, these boundaries come apart, and coalitions form,[156] the generations differences felt previously withstanding, but not taken as conflictual anymore.

As I saw these events unfold from afar as I was in Budapest, I was exhilarated. The narratives that rested with me were coming to life and the potential that I saw in combining the forces of the two generations was actually set in motion.

[156] Reger, *Everywhere and Nowhere*, 104.

Conclusion

I began working on this project with a goal to understand what the "generational" patterns, if any, were in the workings of the older and younger feminist activists in Lahore. However, when simultaneously speaking to the activists in Lahore and, along the way, reading about past activism while witnessing current events unfold in Pakistan (like the Aurat March), I realized how misplaced it would be to frame the project that way. Therefore, I decided to rename the project for instead of confrontational narratives of strong dismissal of each other that I had expected to encounter on both sides, I found political outlooks and narratives of the younger and older activists to be complementary to each other, with a desire to connect with the other on either side: *Tana* means warp, and *Bana* means weft; the two threads that are used together to weave fabric on a loom, and that, I believe is an apt way to depict what my findings suggest of past and contemporary feminist activism in Lahore.

My findings resemble the literature on conflicts between older and younger feminists that arise from a difference in understanding of how one's personal experiences are political. While for WAFers that warranted working on a structural level to bring about the changes that did not exist at the time (legislative safeguards in the time of rampant onslaught on women's rights and liberties), the G@D members acquired their feminist consciousness in an environment which did not warrant emphasizing macro-level demands, but embodying their feminism in everyday life that would propel incremental societal change around them. However, as Reger points out, if positing a particular kind of feminism (in this case, loud, visible resistance like that of WAF's) as the standard and looking around for similar examples, one fails to see everyday resistances happening on a community level; differences between the two types of activism are touted as necessarily conflictual as opposed to seeing them as a manifestation of the movement's continuity. [157]

In Chapters 4 and 5, by using the concept of political generation and how such groups come to be formed on the basis of similar experiences and a shared collective identity, I showed how their political outlooks result from their socio-cultural, and political environment and how their chosen strategies of activism are choices that make the best of the resources available to them. This applies to the WAFers making use of changing circumstances after the 1980s to make lifelong contributions through their organizational bases to advance the struggle for women's rights, while G@D members employ their strongest tool, social media, to reach out and foster a collective identity that sustains a feminist community whose values resonate with

[157] Reger, 54.

hundreds of women, and not only limited to Pakistan. Reductive understandings and knowledge of the work of either would foster negative opinions, as demonstrated in Chapter 6.

In fact, the need for cross communication is enhanced when, as Chapters 4 and 5 showed, limits to own actions (imposed by surrounding political, socio-cultural environment and/or limited resources, and not necessarily dictated by personal feminist outlooks of activists as commonly presumed) are openly acknowledged and lamented upon by either group. This was true for WAF, which acknowledged their inability to problematize the institutions of heterosexual marriage, family and sexuality – not because of an ideological disagreement on the need to do so, but because their community environment, available resources did not make it feasible to do so. In fact, all WAFers were appreciative of the younger activists to openly self-identify as feminists and question these institutions in the present day. Similarly, G@D members self-acknowledged their class identities as being hindrances to connecting with a larger audience, however, contrary to what is commonly presumed, that hindrance did not emanate from a lack of felt need or desire to connect with underprivileged audiences, but a strong reluctance to come across as patronizing while doing so, owing to their own privileged positionalities.

Schneider states that direct opposition to a movement may spark mobilization, unify generations, and enhance movement viability.[158] This became true for G@D and WAF when communication barriers were broken in the rush to unify and respond to the fierce backlash that the Aurat March received in 2019. The complementarity in approach that I mentioned earlier was manifested in the responses to the backlash that ranged from engaging state-level bodies to (a major characteristic of WAF's work), while generating hashtags on social media (a medium extensively used by G@D) to amass country-wide support from women whose personal experiences shared online would constitute the demands for their fundamental rights from the state.

Uniting together to tackle a combined threat did not mean that the differences in approaches and outlooks that were previously felt by activists had disappeared, they still existed; however, the cooperation that resulted, and the considerable change in dynamics for the better between the two groups afterwards (described in Chapter 6), make a perfect case for Reger's observation: that dissension and cooperation in a movement are normal; instead of necessarily presuming them to be conflictual, the evolution in ideas and outlooks can be taken

[158] Schneider, "Political Generations and the Contemporary Women's Movement," 16.

as proof of the movement's viability; of its continuity where priorities and goals are defined within specific political environments.[159]

[159] Reger, *Everywhere and Nowhere*, 54.

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