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Hilal *For* Her Magazine and The Politics of Gender: Formation of Feminine Patriotic Subjects Through the Institution of Army in Pakistan

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Abstract

The year 2018 marked a significant time in the political history of Pakistan when two marginalized groups (i.e., women and transgender persons) captured much of the public attention. *Aurat March* (as a celebration of International Women's Day i.e., IWD) and the promulgation of Transgender Protection of Rights Bill reinvented the politics of gender in Pakistan. While the former event caused a huge backlash (and misogyny) against women the later development produced a wave of transphobia perpetuating violence against trans-bodies. Multiple groups started to take form operating from the right-wing populist spaces and started celebrating IWD to build a counter-narrative against the *Aurat March*. However, during the same year, another sovereign institution i.e., the military started to occupy and contribute to this gender politics through their media wing i.e., Inter Services Public Relations Pakistan (ISPR). This article seeks to identify and analyze the discourses of the Army institution by looking at the media (cultural/material) productions of (ISPR) on gender/women ideology. I am particularly engaging with one magazine called Hilal *for* Her which was launched in 2018. By looking at the editorial content of this magazine (only March issues) through feminist critical discourse analysis it is argued that the feminine political subject imagined by the Military is essentially a national-patriotic woman whose political sensibilities are within the bounds of ideational structures of Islam and culture defined and protected by the Armed Forces of Pakistan.

Keywords: Feminine National-Patriotic Subject, Military Institution, Politics of Gender, Contemporary Pakistan, Ideological Boundaries, Armed Forces

Introduction

> *"By the end of 2018, it was heartening to see that Pakistani society is readier than ever, to evolve and advance by embracing the accomplishments of its women in every field and empowering those who are still in the shadows waiting to realize their potential. And so, we hope to enter 2019 with the vision of a future where there will be abundant opportunities and every person, be it man or woman, will be able to grow and be who they want, commensurate with their potential, making use of the talents they are bestowed with, and become productive citizens of this great nation of ours"* (Zubair, 2019).

In 2021, the teaser of *Dhoop ki Dewar* stirred controversy in Pakistan, for its alleged portrayal of a Hindu (Indian) boy and a Muslim (Pakistani) girl, to be aired on Zee5 (Indian OTT platform). The writer, Umaira Ahmed, of this series, responded at length to

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clarify her stance on this. It is interesting to highlight in her response some of the issues she has identified and clarified.

> *India ky liay kaam* (working for India), *Ghadari-Muluk Dushmani* (traitor and enemy of state), *Paise ky liay Muluk sy Bhandari* (traitor for money), *Hindu-Muslim love story*, *Aman ki Asha* (Ray of peace), *Two nation theory*, *Masla e Kashmir* (Kashmir dispute), *Local channels ko nazar andaz karna* (ignore the local media houses).

These above-mentioned issues are related to ideology, nation-building, gender politics, patriotism, and cultural/media production in Pakistan (Long et al., 2016; Khan & Zia, 1995). In justifying her position as a patriotic Pakistani, she mentioned:

> When I started working on the subject of *Dhoop ki Dewar*, I sent the entire story to ISPR in January 2019. I requested the "evaluation" of the story from the team of ISPR working at that time, so that if there was anything "objectionable" I would "edit" that. ISPR not only said "OK" to this subject (story) but also invited me to Rawalpindi for a meeting and shared that *we also have the same stance over India-Pakistan relations*… if the story of Dhoop ki Dewar had been objectionable to the state, nation, and religion, ISPR would not have asked me for the "editing" but also "stopped" me from writing this. They did not stop me from doing this rather have showed full support (Imran, 2021:21).

In terms of gender politics two of her sections are extremely important to quote here:

> I am telling you explicitly (plainly) that this is not a love story. This is a "social tragedy" about those people who have lost their loved ones (family members) while protecting their state and nation." On the Hindu-Muslim aspect, she expressed, "First of all even if the girl would have been portrayed as a Hindu and the boy had been shown as a Muslim it would not have amounted to their marriage from an Islamic perspective. Secondly, I had no objections to conceptualizing a central character of Pakistani Girl because I had no intention of making them fall in love or anything of that sort. I was concerned about showing humanity, so it did not matter to me if the protagonist was a Pakistani Girl (Imran, 2021:16).

This incident and the consequent response are highly instructive in analyzing gender politics in contemporary Pakistan. Umaira Ahmed's response pointed out the ideational boundaries/limitations around the imaginations of women and womanhood in Pakistan. While Umaira Ahmed soared to the heights of fame due to her fiction novels (especially *Pir-e-Kamil*) where the protagonists are indeed women, her writings build images of women, as observed by (Zakaria, 2019:55), "instead of being rebels or presenting an alternative to the predominant mores of the moment, they represent regression. The women err and suffer and present cautionary tales of what happens to women who do not

at all times worship traditional morality". Moreover, the writings of Umaira Ahmed aimed at producing a particular kind of women. As observed by (Zakaria, 2019:19).

The goal of all of this fiction is to produce pliant women who are so obsessed with their imperfections that they automatically assume that the men around them must, in comparison, be perfect. Faith and morality are fed in huge doses; the dominant flavour is willing to surrender and acknowledge their inevitable deficiencies. Efforts to rebel only result in horrendous consequences and the only option is contrition. Chastity (the always-coveted condition of innocence) can never be restored, but a suitably tearful heroine who has 'learned her lesson' is the product to be sold at the end.

No wonder Umaira Ahmed's association with ISPR solidified as she wrote the popular drama series *Sinf-e-Ahan* (women of Steel), which aired on ARY TV back in 2021. It is interesting to highlight those ideational boundaries of the nation-state drawn, protected, and legitimized by the Pakistan Armed Forces along with the protection of traditional borders has expanded to include women folk in its folds. Hence Armed Forces of Pakistan through ISPR enabled the "right image" of women of Pakistan for the service of the nation-state. Though this appropriation of women/gender is not entirely new, the necessity to construct, disseminate, and protect the image of Pakistani women gained renewed significance since 2018. It is again not a coincidence why this renewed image/narrative building spearheaded by ISPR started back in 2018.

The year 2018 marked a significant year in the political history of Pakistan, especially for gender politics-feminist struggles. While Aurat March i.e., women's march (termed as the fourth wave of feminism (Chaudhary & Saigol, 2020:34), captured the attention of national and international observers, transgender persons have successfully lobbied for and promulgated Transgender Persons (of Rights) Act (2018) since the decades of struggle for their fundamental rights (Khan, 2019; Khan 2020). Both these events were marked/termed as landmark events in Pakistan. Much of the public discourse and imaginaries that ensued afterward revolved around these two events in Pakistan.

IWD's Celebration in Pakistan: Contested Space and Multiple Imaginaries

Aurat March started in 2018 as part of the celebrations of International Women's Day globally. While it started simultaneously in three urban cities of Pakistan i.e., Karachi, Lahore, and Islamabad, it was credited with reviving the feminist politics and women's movement in Pakistan (Zia, 2022; Khan, 2019). Though the history of the feminist and women's movement in Pakistan spawned over many years, the emergence of *Aurat March* started what is called as fourth wave of feminism in Pakistan (Saeed, 2020; Zia, 2018; Saeed, 2022). Scholarly works of Khawar Mumtaz and Farida Shaheed, Rubina Saigol, Afiya S. Zia, Ayesha Khan have documented and analyzed various dimensions of feminist and women's struggle in Pakistan.

While Aurat March emerged what termed a "public expression of anger at misogyny, patriarchal practices, and pervasive gender inequality" (Khan, 2019:398), it stirred/generated a huge backlash in Pakistan. Much of the backlash was directed at the right-wing populist conservative sections of the society labeling organizers and participants of the *Aurat March* as "cultural assassinators" (Zia, 2022:22) who are western funded, anti-religion, anti-culture women trying to destroy the cultural fabric of society of Pakistan. Interestingly the backlash also produced a parallel movement called *Haya March* by the Islamists as a counter-movement to defend the idea of womanhood. They too started mobilizing women/girls on the roads celebrating IWD (seemingly paradoxical since they reject *anything* Western) to capture the public attention and furnish the "true image/picture" of women as given by Islam.

It is essentially the necessity of portraying the image of "true women" in Pakistan that resulted in the emergence of competing ideals, imaginaries, and conceptualizations in public spaces. Among these two dominant trends that surfaced in Pakistan another competing sovereign i.e., Armed Forces (ISPR) started building a counter-narrative (national-patriotic subject) by launching a media campaign (print and electronic) especially, to cater to the "women". Interestingly in the same year i.e., 2018, ISPR produced a documentary titled, "sisters in Arms". Moreover, the idea of woman has also expanded when in 2022 Aisha Mughal (transgender woman) was awarded the Pride of Pakistan award for her outstanding achievements in service of the state of Pakistan. Hence both natal as well as transgender women were included in the nation-building project spearheaded by the institution of the Army.

The Chief of Army Staff (COAS)'s articulation served as the guiding ideology in conceptualization of feminine political subjects in Pakistan. @OfficialDGISPR, the official Twitter account, twitted in 2019 and 2021 respectively on International Women's Day (IWD) quoting the Chief of Army Staff (COAS), the institutional head of the Armed Forces of Pakistan, the significance of Pakistani women in the progress of Pakistan. More specifically these proclamations reflected how women have served the nation by protecting its glory and honour. On 8th March 2019, the official tweet said, "contributions of women on duty in uniform, at household and especially the ones of martyrs' families are greatly valued. The great Pakistani women have a role and responsibility towards progress of Pakistan*".* Again in 2021 the COAS was quoted in the following tweet by DG ISPR: *"*Pakistani women contributed immensely 4 glories & honor of our nation. They are also at the forefront of COVID. Women in uniform have proved their mettle by contributing copiously in diverse fields serving the nation & humanity. They deserve our immense respect & gratitude".

These tweets correspond to the idea of nation-building commanded by the Institution of Armed Forces in Pakistan. The earliest analysis of such an arrangement in Pakistan as discussed by Raymond Moore (1969) "Pakistan army has demonstrated this awareness, recognizing that its nation-building role is second in importance only to its national defense role (Cloughley, 2016). It has set a constructive example of how armies in new

nations can be utilized as vehicles for social change" (Cheema, 2002:456). Scholars like Stephen P Cohen, Hasan Askari Rizvi, Pervaiz Iqbal Cheema, Mazhar Aziz, Ishtiaq Ahmed, and Brian Cloughly have provided significant insights related to the Armed Forces of Pakistan as an institution (Shah, 2014; Paul, 2015).

Every year the month of March rejuvenates the public spirit of nation-building when 23rd March is commemorated as Pakistan Day. The Armed Forces of Pakistan in the 1950s celebrated this day by organizing what is known as the Joint Services Pakistan Day Parade or simply the Pakistan Parade. This day is a reminder of an important resolution passed in the 1940's known as the Lahore resolution that set forth the demand for the creation of a separate homeland for the Muslims of the sub-continent hence the creation of Pakistan. Pakistan Parade is an annual event that is aimed at not only showcasing the military might of the Armed Forces but to forging and renewing the commitment to serve the nation-state both the Armed personnel and civilians alike. While the parade used to be a power show of "all men" displaying their patriotism, the inclusion of women marked a new beginning.

Women became part of this nation-building project through the institution of the Army. This inclusion of women also shifted the paradigm of women *in service* of military to women *serving in* the military. In 2021 women contingent i.e., the "sisters in arms" paraded along with men showcasing this new gendered patriotic subject that is ready to die for the nation-state (the motherland). The same sentiment was reflected by Nawaz (2021) in the following words:

> The women's contingent stood alongside men in sweltering heat, holding the same weapons, they banged their heels on the ground with the same zeal that not only shook the ground but shattered the confidence and plans of the enemy, proving that the women of Pakistan were as ready as its men to safeguard their motherland.

Review of the Literature

Critical studies on the institution of the Military in Pakistan started to take form with the publication of Ayesha Jalal's *State of Martial Rule* in 1991 demonstrating the historical imbalance of political institutions and the intervention of military in the state affairs (Jalal, 1991). Similarly, Ayesha Siddiqa's *Military Inc.* questioned/challenged the expanded control of the Military in the political social, and most importantly economic spheres in Pakistan (Siddiqa-Agha, 2017). The term "Milibus" coined by her is the military-industrial complex manifested in Pakistan stretching from the security/defense sphere into political and economic spaces establishing hegemony (empire) of the military as an institution. Saadia Toor's articulation of the neoliberal security state contributes to the understanding of "the predatory nature of the military in Pakistan" (Toor, 2011:22). She maintained that "the military dominates the state, society, and the economy, creating a predatory

environment that works against the interest of ordinary Pakistanis". In addition, scholars like Christina Fair critically engage with the idea of security and securitization in the case of Pakistan. In her book *Fighting to the End*, she outlined the sense of insecurity inherited by the state of Pakistan by its birth (Fair, 2014).

While these studies have unearthed the aspects of the institution of the Army that were never questioned, scholars like Saba Gul Khattak, Maria Rashid, and Sheila Khoja-Moolji's works have effectively incorporated the gendered analysis while working on the military institution or with the idea of militarization/securitization in Pakistan (Khoja-Moolji, 2021). Saba Gul Khattak's work has systematically shown the consequences of militarization in Pakistan while highlighting the gendered violence perpetuated by the state and its institutions. She has placed her analysis in two broader areas: one locating the issue within the engendering nation-state and the second militarization of civil society in Pakistan (Rizvi, 2000). Drawing her conclusion, she maintained, "Both state as well as the military are informed by the same ideology of patriarchy which results in gendered hierarchies" (Hussain, Mumtaz & Saigol, 1997:51).

More recently Rashid's *Dying to Serve* and Khoja-Moolji's *Sovereign Attachments* have centered their analysis on the subject formation and constitution of masculinities within the institution of the Army and militarism respectively (Khoja-Moolji, 2021). Rashid pointed out the dynamic and evolving relationship between the ideas of womanhood, the nation-state, and militarism in Pakistan by questioning the centrality of female subject to the militarist discourse that is masculinist (Rashid, 2020). Through her ethnographic research, she was able to highlight the materialist foundations of militaristic subjects. Khoja-Moolji's (2021) articulation, however, is based on the "texts" produced by competing "sovereigns" i.e., politicians, military, and militants to conceive "Islamo-masculinity" to be employed for their respective ends.

Significance of the Study

It is against this backdrop that the present research aims to explore and analyze the mediascape (especially of print media) of the Pakistan Armed Forces (i.e., ISPR) in constituting a feminine political subject in contemporary Pakistan. While the objective of the research is to contribute to the emerging scholarship related to gender politics in Pakistan (Rizvi, 2013) the significance of this lies in broadening the analysis of the construction of female political subjects through traditional (security) institutions like the Military (Hussain, 2013).

Research Methodology

The analysis in this research article draws from a critical discourse analysis of the magazine Hilal *for* Her published by ISPR. Hilal *for* Her magazine started its publication back in the year 2018. It publishes 12 issues per year. To analyze the

narratives and discourses, issues of the last seven years (2018-2024) were selected. More specifically the editorials of the issue of March (celebrating IWD) are analyzed critically. The article is divided into two main sections: The discussion is carried out related to the gendered mediascape of Pakistan Armed Forces while the second portion revolves around the issue of how the feminine political subject as national and patriotic self is being imagined, cultivated, and disseminated through these editorial writings.

Gendered Mediascape of Pakistan Armed Forces: ISPR And the Question of Gender/Woman

Ayesha Siddiqa, one of the strongest critical voices on the Military institution in Pakistan, enlarged her critical analysis of the Military in Pakistan by pointing out the significance of media in the contemporary landscape. In the second edition of her scholarly work, Military Inc., she observed the rise of ISPR, the *Media Inc*. as an "expanding control of Pakistan military over the media spaces in Pakistan*"* (Aziz, 2008). ISPR, a PR wing of the Armed Forces, was originally incepted after the independence to disseminate information related to military affairs at the time it gained significance, especially in cultivating a "positive image" of the armed forces in the society since 2007 (Siddiqa-Agha, 2017). It started its outreach in the radio, TV, and film industries of Pakistan by producing, co-producing, owning, and regulating media spaces.

From the creation of a private independent radio network (96 radio stations) to financing films like *Waar* (2013) and *Maalik* (2016) aimed at building a narrative in the society favored by the institution of the Army. That narrative as argued by Sidiqua, would not "challenge the national interest, which translated as supporting a narrative that challenged the traditional elite, painting the military in bright colors, portraying India as an enemy and following the army line on sensitive issues*"* (329). As observed by Nithya Subramanian, a senior researcher and analyst associated with the Institute of South Asia Studies, National University of Singapore (Subramanian, 2021),

> The Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) wing of the Pakistan Armed Forces has started playing an active role in the mass entertainment sector by getting involved in the production of television dramas, patriotic songs, film festivals, and even reality shows. While the industry has welcomed this association, there is a real risk of the establishment exerting control over the narrative and influencing how people think.

Over the period, ISPR has significantly contributed to the media-scape of Pakistan by producing songs, dramas, documentaries, shows, and even a mobile game. While all these audio-visual productions aimed at producing a narrative that would fuel the nation-building project in Pakistan, they started catering to women. Notably in 2018, ISPR launched a music video titled, *Mujhy agay jana hai*, to commemorate

International Women's Day. In this video women from different parts of Pakistan are shown as taking up those roles that are traditionally taken up by men in the society.

> "However, despite the 'progressive' message the video attempts to get across, women are also displayed in traditionally feminine roles-cooking, working in the kitchen, and taking care of their families-as daughters, mothers, and sisters". The lyric of the song also tries to rupture the narrative of victimhood of women. "*Lachar naheen, taaqat hoon mein, kamzor naheen, himmat hoon mein*" (I am not helpless, I am strength, I am not weak, I am courage).

During the same year a documentary titled "Sisters in Arms" was released proudly featuring women in uniform serving at various tires of Pakistan Armed Forces. Again the 'strong women' were shown as perfect housewives, obedient daughters, sacrificing mothers, and resilient sisters. All these women were working along "with the men" to serve the nation-state. Songs like *Mera Dhol Sipahiya* (2018) and *Chadar hai Maa ki* (2018) portrayed loving wives and sacrificing mothers as female custodians of the nation-state ready to sacrifice their husbands/sons for the protection of the "motherland".

The most popular stint of ISPR came in 2021 when Umaira Ahmed (mentioned above) wrote a drama series, titled *Sinf e Aahan* (women of steel) featuring Pakistan's top actresses in the drama industry, "is premised on the lives of six fearless, passionate, and opinionated women, who defy conventions as uniformed lady cadets. It includes women from different socioeconomic backgrounds, religions, and even nationalities to relate to a far wider audience, and ultimately proving that the military is equal and ethical for all those who bear talent and passion to serve*".* The same year, *Aik Hai Nigar*, a telefilm, again penned by Umaira Ahmed was released which was a biopic of Pakistan's first female officer to be promoted to Lieutenant General of Pakistan.

Discussion And Analysis

Hilal *for* Her Magazine: A Premier Defense Print Publication for Women

Hilal *for* Her is a monthly (bilingual) publishing magazine that started back in 2018. It was one of the many magazines published by the Pakistan Armed Forces under the title of Hilal. The earliest publication of this magazine dates back to 1948 to inform the public/society about the dynamic nature of the security environment that Pakistan functions in. Over the course, the magazine not only expanded its circulation but also its outreach to the readers by introducing the bilingual issues of the magazine for women and kids. As mentioned, "It remains the premier defense print publication with its editorial scope spanning a wide range of subjects coming from the first-rate writers and thinkers in the country. The magazine is dedicated to delivering trustable and extensive analysis and information about Pakistan".

As stated above Hilal *for* Her started its publication in 2018 to "pay tribute to the women of the Armed Forces, encouraging, promoting, and protecting their identity and convictions". It further adds to this aim "to inspire and educate women to play an effective and vibrant role in bringing about progressive change in society". Though this magazine was aimed to cater to the demographic of "women", it explicitly mentions its readership and consumption for "both women and men". The content of the magazine can be categorized into the following themes: inspiration, issues and challenges, travel, news, *soins aux femme*, recipes, and miscellaneous.

The magazine called for/aimed at generating a new understanding and conceptualization of the word "empowerment" for women in Pakistan. Without identifying the sources/causes of discrimination, oppression, and subjugation of women it aimed at the transformation of society. What is most interesting to highlight here is that the conceptualization of women's progress is predicated on the institution of motherhood and the support of the male partners. While acknowledging women's presence and contribution in society through various fields it reinforces certain traditional gender roles. As mentioned, "We have women excelling and outshining in the defense forces, law enforcement & intelligence agencies, government and semi-government organizations, private and industrial sectors, IT and communication, media and transport, and more importantly, at home" (Tan, 2005).

The magazine furthers the role of the Armed Forces of Pakistan in providing opportunities to women in the Armed Forces. It establishes the image of the Institute of the Army as an institution that believes in providing opportunities for women to participate and contribute to the defense of the nation-state. However central to their agenda is to enable women so that they can protect their sense of identity and conviction, through education and knowledge. Laying bare this belief in the following words, "We are confident that this will inspire and educate our womenfolk, who can play an effective and vibrant role towards bringing a progressive change in the society".

The first issue of Hilal *for* Her appeared in October 2018 and was "extremely well-received". The reception of the magazine and the "approbation and commendations" received thereof were expressed as "overwhelming" in the editorial. Charting its course of action, the editorial reads as follows:

> The issue hit just the right notes with its content. Our objectives: to celebrate the role, women of our country have played in its creation, progress, and development; educate and inspire the youth of today about the importance of the role of women in the evolution and advancement of society and polity, by throwing the spotlight on their accomplishments; increasing the awareness, that women have it in them to change the course, not only of their own lives but that of history; and that empowerment is to realize one's potential and garner support and encouragement to achieve greatness, proved to be in line with the pulse of the society, as demonstrated by the rave reviews we got (October 2018) (Ahmed, 2012).

Women as National-Patriotic Subjects

First and foremost, women are imagined and conceptualized as political subjects within a nationalistic space/project/enterprise in service of the nation-state. Appealing to the sensibilities of nationalism steeped in patriotism the necessity of serving the homeland is deemed supreme and defining characteristic of this feminine political subject. In 2019 the editorial piece while pointing to the existential crisis of Pakistan urged its citizens (now women included) "to pledge to do whatever they can for the peace and development of the country and to help it enter into the future as a proud nation" (Hilal *for* Her, March 2019). It is important to highlight here how the ideal womanhood is attached to the conception of a citizen who is ready to serve the nation-state. This service of polity is termed a "great cause of nation-building" again necessitated in the editorial of (Hilal *for* Her, March 2020). It is expressed in the following passage:

> For Pakistan to realize its great destiny, its women have a central part to play. While we appreciate the dynamism of women in the struggle for Pakistan, and in nation-building and progress of the country since its creation, the journey continues. Throughout history, this central role of women has ensured the stability, progress, and long-term development of any nation (Hilal *for* Her, March 2020).

While women's capacity as a national subject is considered to be contributing to the development of the state, they are being reminded of their selves and also the people around them. In 2021 the fact was reiterated in these words: Every Pakistani woman needs to realize that the part she has to play in the chain of events that will lead to the realization of the dream of a peaceful and prosperous Pakistan is foundational and recognize her capacity and role for the betterment of the country, her own and that of those associated with her (Hilal *for* Her, March 2021).

Reinforcing Traditional Gender Roles and Centrality of Family and Home

This aspect as mentioned above brings to the second point of discussion that is related to the constituent element in the construction of "ideal womanhood" i.e., reinforcement of traditional gender roles for women. Again, the feminine nationalistic subject as a conceived ideal must possess/comply with the conventional gender roles i.e., of being mothers, sisters, daughters, and wives. Hilal *for* Her March issue 2019 echoed this in these words, "This day is an homage to all women around the world who are playing a pivotal and extraordinary part in shaping and improving the world in their various roles – be it mothers, daughters, wives, sisters, professionals or movers and shakers". The traditional gender roles for women are considered primary and foundational.

Among these traditional gender roles, the role of mothering is considered central in the imagination of an ideal womanhood. Mothers, through their sons (as protectors of the motherland and sons of soils), contribute to the making of a nation-state. It is through the

reinforcement of the institution of motherhood that the conception of the feminine political subjects is materialized. As reflected in Hilal *for* Her (March 2020):

> Of all the diverse roles women play, none is more important than that of mothers because mothers are the real builders of a nation; they are responsible for bringing up the next generation. The ideals and values they instil in their children are what determine the height of glory that a nation can achieve. They are the ones who mold us into responsible and productive citizens. Women, notably mothers, play the most crucial role in society. They are the roots that hold in place the immense tree that society is and also give it the ingredients it needs for its sustenance and for it to flourish.

In addition to the emphasis of these gender roles for women their contribution within homes and in family building is considered essential/inevitable. The feminine political subjectivities are therefore inextricably linked with concepts of "family building" Hilal *for* Her (March 2019) and their presence/role "inside their homes" (Hilal *for* Her, March 2021 & 2023). This line of thought also revitalizes the dichotomy of the public/private sphere, where women are considered makers of the home/family as part of the private sphere.

These ideal traditional gender roles of women are not only considered significant for their selves but also as an inspiration for other women in society. Capitalizing on concepts like solidarity and sisterhood, these imaginations are utilized in forging "unity of action among themselves" (Hilal *for* Her, March 2022). A conducive environment and support for women are linked with the idea of success. This is highlighted: "In a traditional society like ours, women and their families find it comforting if they are surrounded by other women. This women-for-women strategy can help the less privileged women in pursuing their dreams and to find their place in national life*"* (Hilal *for* Her, March 2022).

Religious Ideology and Conception of Ideal Womanhood

Thirdly the prescriptive gender roles for women are augmented by the religious worldview of Islam. Women's rights, capabilities, and powers are imagined as "endowed to women by the Almighty" (Hilal *for* Her, 2019 & 2023). Moreover, to recognize their ideal feminine self, the women are imagined as protectors of the ideological boundaries established by the religion. As opined by the editor, "They held their purdah, they abided by the cultural norms and made outstanding achievements" (Hilal *for* Her, March 2022).

These ideational boundaries were erected to protect women from internal and external (foreign) cultural influences. To create a distinction between what is "right" from what is "wrong" these religious ideals are framed as fostering women's rights in contemporary Pakistan. The issues of Hilal *for* Her (2019 & 2023) reiterated this fact in the following narration: "We live in a global world now and in this global culture

of 'women empowerment,' the Pakistani woman has to play a lead role because she is a role model, carrying great values, a religion, and culture that emphasize education, care, tolerance, equality and non-discrimination."

The Invisible "Enemy" and Unidentified Sources of Women's Oppression

Fourthly it is interesting to highlight that though it has been mentioned consistently almost every year that women face issues and challenges in Pakistan, the source(s) from which they are emanating were never pointed out or discussed. As if the "enemy" of women is an invisible, nameless, and unidentifiable entity that is present in society but not to be named. In some instances, cultural sensibilities are considered impediments for women to realize their full potential. Women in Pakistan are only reminded to "respond as they had before to the internal and external enemies" (Hilal *for* Her, March 2019). Again, they are being told to take care of themselves "so that they can pull off the many challenges of being a woman" (March 2020). These issues are presented not unique to women in Pakistan only rather presented as universal to women all over the world. As reflected, "In Pakistan, like in many other parts of the world, women face numerous challenges that deter them from entering the workforce and fully participating in society" (Hilal *for* Her, March 2024).

It is interesting to mention here two points in conjunction with the above observation. One, like the nameless enemy of women, International Women's Day (IWD) is imagined within the framework of the United Nations (United Nations Day for Women's Rights and International Peace) without outlining the history of the day. The idea of celebrating IWD is therefore stripped out of its revolutionary past and cast into a neoliberal mold as merely a celebratory day for women's achievements (Hilal *for* Her, March 2019, 2022, 2024). Second, the solution to women's problems in Pakistan is thought to be related to the culturally specific context. The editorial of Hilal *for* Her (March 2021) reflects on this:

> No foreign model could be considered a fix for any concerns in Pakistan. We need to work within our unique context to address our problems so that the solutions will be workable, acceptable, and sustainable; a Band-Aid approach is not a cure. Whatever progress has come about is home-grown and the shortcomings will also need to be addressed in our milieu.

Prioritization and Classification of Women's Rights

This brings us to another significant aspect related to the above point of discussion. While the "enemy" of the women remained nameless, the solutions to women's issues and problems are explicitly highlighted. Among those education (or right to education) is prioritized over all other ways to improve the status of women in a society. Education is considered almost inevitable for the success of women and the improvement of society. As articulated in one editorial:

> Education is key to a nation's ability to develop and achieve sustainable targets. The contribution of women to a society's transition from pre-literate to literate is undeniable and so their education cannot be overemphasized. Parents should realize

> the importance of educating their daughters because their education means the progress of the whole nation and generations to come. Educated women are the reformers of the society. Any change begins at the level of an individual and women are the most pivotal in bringing about change not just at the personal level but also because of the individuals whose thoughts they shape. Suffice it to say none of this is possible without educated women (Hilal *for* Her, March 2020).

Even the idea of women's economic empowerment is linked to "access to quality education". Presenting statistics of lowest literacy rates for women in the world, it is argued that "lack of education limits women's ability to secure well-paying jobs and hinders their participation in decision-making processes" (Hilal *for* Her, March 2024). Women's right to employment, economic spaces, decision-making, and their roles within politics or sports are imagined once women get the right to education across Pakistan.

Guiding Philosophy and Vision of The Founding Fathers and the Womenfolk

Lastly, the feminine political subject conceived through these articulations is not only deeply embedded in the political history (mainstream) of Pakistan but also guided, supported, and encouraged by the "founding forefathers" of the nation (Hilal *for* Her, March 2020). Who else other than the Quaid-i-Azam (father of the nation), Muhammad Ali Jinnah can provide the vision for the women of Pakistan to realize their potential? As mentioned in Hilal *for* Her Quaid's vision provides guiding inspiration in the following words, "There are two powers in the world; one is the sword and the other is the pen. There is great competition and rivalry between the two. There is a third power stronger than both, that of the women."

Jinnah's vision Hilal *for* Her (March 2021) is not only an inspiration for women to progress in the future but also a reminder of the immense contribution's women has played in the political history of Pakistan. These political struggles of women are recalled in the following words:

> The fact that women entered into the independence struggle, particularly after the March 23, 1940, resolution calling for the creation of Pakistan, set the precedent for the role women were expected to play in the new nation. Quaid-i-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah elucidated what was expected of Muslim women pre- and post-partition. Muslim women and their families stepped up to the plate on his call and lent support to the struggle for independence (Hilal *for* Her, March 2021).

Women's political journey in service of the nation-state is considered an ideal to be followed by the rest of the women in society. Their political participation is celebrated as their strength while their motivations are tied with the preservation of the nation-state. Their commitment is mentioned as, "No doubt in challenging times our women and society have answered the call; contributions of women in Pakistan Movement and in times of crisis after independence are a testament to this" (Hilal *for* Her, March 2022).

Women's political aspirations and sensibilities are fashioned as an allegiance to the nation-state. Therefore, the celebration of womanhood (on IWD) is observed in conjunction with Pakistan Day. Through this, the image of a feminine political subject is recast as a national-patriotic subject that is willing and equipped to serve the nation and polity. The connection between IWD and Pakistan Day is observed in the following words:

> In Pakistan, International Women's Day (IWD) is celebrated the same month we celebrate Pakistan Day to commemorate the Lahore Resolution that led to shifting gears of the freedom struggle by the Muslims of the Subcontinent. The founding fathers had a dream about how the citizens of the nation would live and contribute to national life in the new country; women were to play just as important a role as men in this context. So celebrating IWD in the same month should also serve as a reminder for Pakistani women that all the ideals that are enunciated by various campaigns for this day are the same that were envisioned by our founding fathers for the women of this country, and that makes it our duty to our country that we empower ourselves to help our country progress and develop (Hilal *for* Her, March 2023).

Conclusion

What this article has demonstrated is to analyze the potential of an institution in constituting a feminine political subject that can serve the cause of nation-state unquestionably. These new political subjectivities demand complete, forging allegiances (unapologetically and uncritically) not only to the nation-state but also to those institution(s) that are considered the protectors of the nation and the polity such as the Armed Forces of Pakistan. Consequently, these institutions actively contribute to the conceptualization of ideal subjects to become part of the nation as patriotic beings. Formation of such subjectivities, as reflected in this article, requires (radical) reimagination of identities most importantly the gender identities. Images of feminine political subjects and ideal womanhood therefore conceived within and disseminated through the mediascape i.e., ISRP of Armed Forces.

However, the story of manufacturing national allegiances through media is not limited to the conventional media spaces. The disciplinary control/power has been extended, in recent years, into cyberspace (also within social media) to counter what is otherwise known as Hybrid warfare in Pakistan (Jaspal, 2020). The recent official document, Pakistan National Security Policy 2022-2026, is a testament to the supposedly expanded presence of military establishment in the cyber and social media spaces (National Security Division, 2022). It is mentioned in the following words:

> Hybrid warfare is an evolving concept with expanding and blurring boundaries. It has found salience in the contemporary era due to technological and

> information revolution. Apart from information and cyber warfare, disinformation, influence operations, lawfare, and economic coercion, among other hybrid warfare tools are increasingly being applied. Hybrid threats against Pakistan originate from states and their proxies as well as from non-state actors. Pakistan will adopt a holistic, inter-connected whole-of-nation approach to neutralize attempts to undermine Pakistan's security and stability through hybrid warfare (Jaspal, 2020:26; Rahman, 2022).

Though gender security is included in this policy document as an inevitable aspect of national security policy, it is devoid of any meaningful articulation of why it is significantly linked with national security or how gender security can be achieved successfully. While women and transgender persons are included as subjects of this gender security paradigm it is entirely left to the imaginations of the institutions of the Armed Forces to constitute an ideal feminine political subject for the consumption of the nation-state. The same aim is echoed in the latest issue of the Magazine Hilal *for* Her (2024) in these words:

> As we reflect on this year's theme of investing in women, let us commit to taking concrete actions to empower, support, and uplift women in Pakistan and worldwide…By investing in women, we are investing in their future and also the future of our communities, our economy, and our society as a whole.

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