

## **The modes and spaces of love and loving in middle-class Pakistan**

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### **Abstract**

In recent years, a burgeoning literature has attended to transformations in notions of intimacy, romantic love and conjugality in South Asia. Much of it has focused on the changes influenced by capitalist and neoliberal ideologies (see e.g. Osella 2012; Donner 2016; Srivastava 2004) and, in many ways, follows on from previous work that investigated the linkages between colonial modernity and family life (see e.g. Dalmia 2006; Majumdar 2009). Although both bodies of work have made important interventions in challenging depictions of these processes as unilineal shifts from collective (“traditional”) obligations, the focus remains on transformation. In this respect, they make use of emotions and intimacy as a site to understand broader societal changes. In this article, I draw upon this literature to consider the changes in ideas on romantic love in middle-class Pakistan, but also depart from such debates through an investigation of how different modes and understandings of intimacy coexist. I focus more squarely on emotions themselves, viewing them not as ways to reflect upon broader processes of change and class development, but as constitutive of middle-class ways of being and imagining the world. Through an ethnographic focus on young married women from aspiring and upwardly-mobile backgrounds in Lahore and Karachi, I draw attention to the different modes of love in their lives. Living largely in joint-family arrangements, these young women continuously negotiate between, on the one hand, private desires for nuclear family life and associated forms of consumption and, on the other hand, the economic pressures and emotional obligations that necessitate collective living. I focus on the various modes of love that emerge through these negotiations, the spaces in which they are experienced and enacted, and how they coexist in the lives of young women. Through these reflections, the larger aim of the article is to both challenge the teleological representations of love in postcolonial contexts as shift from “tradition” to “modernity”, and to bring to the forefront the centrality of emotions in studying contemporary middle-class life in Pakistan.

### **Introduction**

In recent years, there has emerged a wide body of anthropological scholarship on ideas on romantic love, intimacy and conjugality in South Asia. Focusing on questions of individual agency and desire, the influence of capitalist ideologies and the consumption of Bollywood and television romances, this work has made an important intervention in our understanding of contemporary intimate practices.<sup>1</sup> In particular, it has disrupted teleological assumptions that romantic love, signifying idioms of individual choice and agency, represents a shift away from collective obligations and ‘traditional’ life to modernity.<sup>2</sup> It is true that in local imaginings in South Asia, as in the postcolonial world more broadly, romantic love and its pleasures have long been associated with fantasies (and horrors) of modernity and as a break from the past.<sup>3</sup> Yet, as this ethnographic work reminds us, individual agency is fettered with a sense of accountability and responsibility towards family and kin, and that love marriage couples often evaluate their union in relation to the familial support that they garner.<sup>4</sup> These insights dovetail with those of historical work that has unravelled the ways in which colonial modernity impacted family and intimate life.

Disregarding assumptions of unilineal shifts, it has highlighted the ways in which ‘modern’ and ‘traditional’ intimate practices are co-produced, drawing upon both new configurations and ideas and older repertoires and lexicons.<sup>5</sup>

I take up these themes in this article to reflect upon prevailing ideas on romantic love and marital happiness amongst young women from upwardly-mobile and middle-class backgrounds in Lahore. In particular, through a focus of emotions, I attend to coexistence of ideals of intimacy centred around romantic love between a couple, with ideas of love and attachment that tie persons to the wider family. The balance between these two ideals is of significant concern in upwardly-mobile circles, where embourgeoisement had been made possible through familial support. The continued relevance of the family is, by no means, particular to Pakistan or to South Asia; as McKinnon has demonstrated, it is a feature of modernity more broadly.<sup>6</sup> However, the configuration that this has taken in Lahore, and in urban Pakistan more broadly, is that aspiring groups often depend on joint living arrangements to succeed in, and offset the risks of, the neoliberal economy. For young women like my interlocutors, the obligations, demands and intimacies of joint family exist alongside desires for romantic love, and the consumption of pleasures and experiences built around a couple.

Tracing the emotions expressed in women’s descriptions of how they pursued romances with their (now) husband, as well as reflections on married life within a joint family, I unravel how different ideals of intimacy exist, the ways in which they are entangled and the sites and spaces in which they separate. Through this, I draw attention towards the emotional liminality that is ever-present in their everyday lives, choices and practices. Liminality, classically described as a “state .. betwixt-and-between” in Turner’s analysis of rituals, has been taken up and equated, in a variety of ways, with the construction and experience of modernity.<sup>7</sup> Some have pointed towards the role of liminality in historical processes and projects, such as Enlightenment in Europe, and delved in the desire for liminal experiences in modern life, others have deployed the concept for theorizing contemporary processes, such as migration, mass protests and political revolutions.<sup>8</sup> And, although he does not directly make use of the term, Appadurai’s interventions, on spaces and scapes of contestation that mark modernity at large, provide a parallel in terms of an openness towards a continuous flux in identity and subjectivities.<sup>9</sup> In this article, I draw upon this larger theme, of the linkages between liminality and modernity, to discuss the conflicting emotions and desires that arise as my interlocutors negotiate various structures of reason and practice; family, individual, sexual, consumption. It is precisely through this emotional liminality, of being pulled in different directions and remaining in flux, that middle-class belonging – and, by extension modernity – is produced, practiced and performed. Ultimately, it is not the transformation from collective to individualised ties, but the management of these differing demands that is constitutive of ‘feeling’ middle-class.<sup>10</sup>

I do not attempt to theorize the category of emotion, and the shape that they take in the lives of my interlocutors. Instead, following Beatty, I am led by the narrative account of my ethnography, remaining sensitive to the experiences described and articulated by my interlocutors while acknowledging their wider circumstances.<sup>11</sup> The ethnography is based on nine months of fieldwork, conducted in 2016-2017, with young married women from upwardly-mobile backgrounds in Lahore and Karachi.<sup>12</sup>

Within these families, like elsewhere in Pakistan in other South Asian contexts, arranged marriages are the norm, both in prevalence and in social approval.<sup>13</sup> However, love unions, in the form of love-cum-arranged marriages – where partners engage in a pre-marital romance but then seek parental approval and follow typical marriage proceedings – and elopements that are on the rise.<sup>14</sup> Through semi-structured interviews and extended participant observation, I focus on accounts of love marriages, predominantly love-cum-arranged marriages, but with some instances of elopements.

I begin with a description of joint family life in contemporary middle-class settings and move to discuss the demands and responsibilities they place on young women. This is followed by a discussion of the ways in which these conflicting demands – desire for romance and responsibility towards kin – come together in romantic pursuits and the emotions they generate. Viewing the middle-class as a ‘feeling’ community, I unravel the centrality of emotional liminality and its perpetuation in structuring middle-class life and means of self-representation and distinction.

### **The joint family in middle-class Lahore**

The rise of the ideal of romantic love between a couple, contained within a marriage, dovetails with changes related to colonial modernity. Social transformations, such as employment in the colonial bureaucracy or institutions, provided greater opportunities for men to live away from the extended families and encouraged a desire for more dyadic or companionate relations between a couple.<sup>15</sup> Similarly, reform movements, with their agenda to sculpt female comportment to suit idealised visions of the nation, lent themselves to a new kind of pact between husbands (as a ‘guru’ figure or teacher), and wives (as the pupil).<sup>16</sup> Together, these changes contributed not only towards a ‘new patriarchy’, where wives came under the authority of husbands, rather than the extended family, but also shifted notions of intimacy between a couple.<sup>17</sup> While previously, for men, love and sensual satisfaction were to be found outside the household, with wives expected to propagate the interests within, the new ideal that emerged was one of a romantic couple, forged together by marriage. However, in colonial India, this vision was a discursive ideal – one that was extensively discussed and written about, giving an entry point to young reformers for reforming the *zenana* – but was rarely available in practice where social, economic and intimate life remained largely tethered to the extended family.<sup>18</sup>

Anthropological work on contemporary love marriages in South Asia affirms the continuing relevance of the family. For instance, Mody shows that love marriage couples in Delhi may act against the wishes of their family but still feel accountable to them. Similarly Abeyasekera points towards the sense of familial responsibility felt by young women in Colombo while choosing a partner.<sup>19</sup> Meanwhile de Neve unravels that, in Tamil Nadu, love marriage couples often evaluate their union in relation to the familial support that they garner.<sup>20</sup> These works disrupt teleological imaginings of romantic love between a couple representing an uncomplicated shift from collective to individual subjectivities, and also call into question conceptions of ‘modernity’ and ‘tradition’. Majumdar’s work on colonial Bengal highlights that ‘arranged marriages’ – often considered as the hallmark of ‘traditional’ South Asian marital practices – were, in fact, a response to the growing importance of the romantic

couple. The contestation between ideas on the couple and on family gave rise to new marital forms; arranged marriages ‘recognised the centrality of the couple but, at the same time, subordinated it to the larger ideal’ of the reconstituted joint family.<sup>21</sup>

The jostling together of ideas on intimacy centred on a couple with those arranged around the family are ever-present in upwardly-mobile groups in Lahore and Karachi, where joint living is the norm. For at least the first decade, if not two or more, most young couples live in joint family arrangements, where they reside in the same dwellings as the man’s brothers (and their nuclear family), parents and unmarried sisters. The physical arrangements of such living can vary depending on the space and finances available. In most instances, the norm is shared living within a single house, with each son (and his wife) given only a separate room. Here, common spaces, such as living rooms and kitchens were shared, and everyone sat and ate together at mealtimes. However, most couples keep a television in their own rooms and, in an aspect I return to in the last section, a fridge that contained food and groceries intended for only their nuclear family’s consumption. The expectation is that as each son’s family expands and the financial position strengthens, he will make arrangements for building a separate portion above the family house. Driven and halted according to need and available capital, such developments were piecemeal. Often, it would commence with the construction of a bedroom upstairs followed, some time later, with another room and, later on, with a kitchen. Among more well-heeled middle class families, it is common to find, particularly in Lahore, narrow but multiple-storied houses, with each floor built at a different time from the other and in contrasting styles. In Karachi, where flat living is the norm for middle-class families, this kind of vertical expansion is often difficult. Instead, efforts are made for either acquiring neighbouring apartments or, after the first decade, moving to a separate apartment.

Joint family living can be considered ‘traditional’, in that it has been a common practice dating back to colonial times, if not before. However, its continued presence in Lahore and Karachi is closely linked to an encounter with neoliberal modernity. While the established middle-class in Lahore and Karachi is a product of state support – as imperfect as it was – this new middle-class is reflective of its roll-back and, in turn, roll-out of economic liberalization.<sup>22</sup> For instance, until the early 1980s, common middle-class professions, such as administrative posts in state institutions, engineering, law and college teaching, came with a government-allotted house and an income deemed appropriate for middle-class living standards. In present times, however, such employment rarely comes with housing benefits and neither does it provide enough income for the kind of consumption-driven lifestyle associated with contemporary middle-class life, such as private schooling for children and enjoyment of branded goods and westernized leisure activities. Thus, while some new middle-class and upwardly families are still engaged in such professions, they often augment income from other sources, most often urban property. More commonly, however, upwardly-mobile groups are often involved in small to mid-size businesses, such as mobile phone, computers and electronics retail; or generator and automobile spare parts. This is reflective of both the harsh labour market, with limited prospects of vertical movement, and the valorised status of owning a business. Many young men had embarked on business administration education programmes with aspirations for acquiring well-paid jobs in multinational corporations and banks, or in well-known local companies in the private sector. However, after graduating, they were either

unable to land these coveted job or were hired at positions which did not pay well or included little prospect of internal promotion.<sup>23</sup> Faced with this disappointment, they turned towards establishing their own business. Meanwhile, others had pursued business degrees so that they could help 'formalise' and expand their family's existing enterprises.

With little state support, initial investment costs in property and business ventures are met through family support and collective pooling of resources. Since both kinds of venture require heavy inputs, joint family living becomes a way to reduce costs requiring ready cash, such as utility bills and living costs. In most cases, business owners do not draw salary for themselves; instead, the combined household costs are met by the business and the whole family shares the benefits of the incoming profits, such as buying a new car for the family. By living together and reducing total costs, resources are freed up for spending on the brands, leisure activities and lifestyle experiences associated with middle-class life. For instance, Shella, her husband, along with their one-year old son, lived in the same property as her two brother-in-laws, their wives and children, and her parents-in-law. All the brothers worked in the family business of generator spare parts, a firm that had been started by their father. Each of the brothers drew a small salary for themselves, but the bulk of their living costs – utility bills, schools fees, groceries – were paid by the father. The business was doing well, but none of the brothers could afford to buy their own houses, or, at least not while maintaining the lifestyle they currently enjoyed. As Shella said to me, 'now it's like on the weekend, we can take our son to the play area in McDonalds, maybe eat at a restaurant ourselves, and buy him nice clothes'. She continued, 'if we live alone, then it would be hard to live like this ... and also we would not have the family car ... they [the family] bought a new big one ... we would have a small one on our own'. Equally, others were of the opinion that moving away, to a nuclear household, would mean that they will not be able to enjoy the fruits and perks of the family business.

The reliance on joint family arrangement was not limited to new middle-class families involved in the local economy, but also among those who were working abroad. A significant portion of men from new middle-class families have invested in small businesses in the Gulf, Malaysia and, increasingly, China, often in electronic spare-parts, scrap metal and construction contracting. Meanwhile, others have found employment in banking, and in the expanding telecommunication sectors in the Gulf, Central Asia and the Balkan states. While Osella and Osella have reported some linkages between Gulf migration and family nuclearization in Kerala, I found that, in contrast, it has increased dependency on the joint family for a variety of reasons. Jobs and businesses abroad certainly bring in more money than their equivalent in Pakistan.<sup>24</sup> However, it is not enough to bring an entire family abroad while maintaining a middle-class lifestyle. Most men thus live in shared accommodation abroad and send money home, which allows their children to attend English-medium schools and the family, more broadly, to consume a middle-class life. With their husbands living away, young wives were expected to live with the joint family, where they could enjoy the support of older women in the house and be appropriately chaperoned by men from the family. Such arrangements allowed for a kind of double monitoring: it not only helped men to control and track their wives' activities when away, but it also to be kept abreast, through their spouse, of happenings within the larger family.<sup>25</sup> Phrased differently, it allowed the men to keep a proverbial 'foot in the door' and to protect their share of the property back home. The business and

employment abroad were vulnerable to setbacks – job losses and bankruptcy were not unusual, especially after the end of the construction boom in the Gulf in mid 2000s – and many found themselves unemployed for months while they looked for alternative avenues. In such moments, the joint family offered a fall-back as they looked for alternative avenues and ventures. Like in other contexts, it is not simply ‘tradition’ but precisely the encounter with the modern entrepreneurial culture, and associated desires of consumption, that have increased reliance on joint family life.<sup>26</sup>

### **Support, burden and loss in the joint family**

It is tempting, given this description, to think of the centrality of the joint family solely in terms of economic constraints and strategic decision-making. However, discussions about emotional attachment to joint family life, and the intimacies that are enjoyed in such arrangements, provide a more ambivalent picture. Certainly, many women long for their own houses, where they can enjoy an intimate life with their nuclear family. Many of my interlocutors complained that living in a joint family meant that they never spend much time alone with their husbands. After coming home from work, their husbands felt obliged to spend time with other members of the family before retiring to their private rooms or spaces. Others also felt that they were unable to enforce the routine that they wanted for their children, or expressed irritation about the competition between their offspring and of other nuclear families in the house. Similarly, the burden of housework for the extended family, even if shared amongst all young women, was sometimes a source of consternation.

The discomforts and problems of joint family life were often articulated through desires and dreams of having their own house one day. I often heard the expression, said with wistfulness and longing, ‘is there any woman in this world who does not want her own house’. Many of my interlocutors showed me boxes of packed kitchen utensils or crockery, given to them in their dowry, that they were waiting to open in their own homes one day in the future. Others told me of their fantasies about what their own house would like and how they would style and decorate them, a privilege that at the time, for most, was limited to their private spaces in the extended family home. Reema, for instance, had a collection of photos of home interiors on her phone, taken from different social media accounts, that she liked and wanted to imitate in her future house. The ideas on intimacy and ideal marital life, reflected in these conversations, conformed to visions of modernity, articulated in television dramas, advertisements and modernist state discourses, that promote the ideal life as one of a consuming nuclear family. In everyday life, this vision translates into a sense of waiting, a feeling that one needs to make do with the present, but actual living begins in the future. In other words, it creates a sense of ‘betwixt and between’ – a liminal phase that requires passing. This feeling, of being neither nor there, was expressed by my informants, in an almost matter-of-fact way, as an essential part of middle-class life. Similar to ideas on ‘adjustment’ in married life in India, this is seen as part of a married life-course for women. And, more importantly, as I shortly explain, these emotions of feeling torn about the life you are living in the present and what awaits in the future is viewed as an integral part of inhabiting a middle-class worldview.

At the same time, while joint living comes in the way of living out these fantasies of an ideal modern life, most were also aware of, and commented upon, its benefits. The same women who complained about the demands of labour and lack of independence

also spoke of the financial stability and freedom that came from living together. In fact, it was precisely living together that was helping them consume some of the goods associated with the 'modern' future they desired. More than the financial benefits, others talked of the comforts of female company, assistance and advice. As women rarely worked or went out unchaperoned, they relied upon female companionship available at home. Those who had managed to move into an independent home talked of missing the company of sister-in-laws and admitted feeling lonely. In addition, they spoke of missing the help of other women in housework and childcare. With their husbands away, usually until late in the evening, they were left to manage everything on their own and spoke longingly of how, in joint living, other women were around to watch your children as you took care of other tasks, or rested. One informant, suffering from a bad cold when I visited her, told me that her husband was caring in that he kept calling her from work to see how she was, but it was not the same as living in the joint home where her sister in law would make a special soup for her.

The care and concern of other women in the family was not just about physical comfort and ease, but was also related to a sense of self and personhood, especially in relation to milestones and life events, such as child birth. This was especially poignant in the feelings of loss and hurt, expressed by women who had love marriages, which were not acknowledged and accepted by their family or of their husbands. Although content with the love and attention of her husband, Annie confided in me the sadness that she felt that her mother in law had never visited her in hospital when she gave birth to their son. 'During the pregnancy, my husband would say do not worry, my mother will now forgive us, she will knit a hat and scarf for our son, just like she did for others'. Annie told me that when the baby was born, the mother in law called her on the phone, but never visited. In her conversation with me, Annie repeatedly brought up how no woman from her husband's home had visited her in the hospital or that her son had nothing handmade. 'Everyone [other women in the hospital] had visits from their husband's family ... you know how you a woman is given bangles when a son is born. No one came to see me, it was just me and my husband'.

Other women, whose own family had not accepted their marriage, spoke of similar feelings of loss. One informant, who had married against her family's wishes, mentioned the hurt that she had felt that none of the women in the family had come to her wedding. Her husband's family had organised a small event, to mark the marriage, and had invited her family members, in a bid to normalise relations. In response, her two brothers had come but left without eating. She said, 'more than anything, I felt bad .. still feel sad ... that my younger sister in law did not come. My mother, I can understand, she was forbidden but she loves me, but my sister in law, she could have convinced my brother [her husband]'. Parallel to what Mody has described of elopements in Delhi, where individual agency, to act on romantic desires, is accountable to the family, my informants' experience of joy in intimate life remains tethered to acceptance and acknowledgement.<sup>27</sup> And, like in Mody's ethnography, many of my informants hoped for future reconciliation and acceptance from their wider families.

In many ways, it appeared that yearning for the support and togetherness, after moving away, maintained the sense of liminality that was felt when living together. Many women spoke with a sense of ambivalence and regret about children living in

nuclear setups; not only did living apart remove them from the ‘barkat’ (blessing) of elders but also that it impeded their moral growth. As one woman explained, ‘if [my children] live with our elders, they see me and their father looking after them, they learn to think and feel that they need to look after us also’. Thus, while most women yearned for the time they could have their own home, they simultaneously expressed a sense of moral loss at living apart. It was through this sense of both desiring a nuclear life while deploring the moral loss of togetherness that my informants established their own morality and middle-class virtues. Tracing the centrality of virtuous self-cultivation in North Indian Muslim settings, Pernau has argued that ideals of appropriate comportment – moral steadfastness, compassion towards others and self discipline – not only guided individual behaviour, but became means of self-identification as a community. Equally, they were deployed as a ‘criterion of distinction’, a basis for inclusion of those who ‘feel’ the same way and for exclusion of others who do not fit these standards.<sup>28</sup> Similarly, Sara Ahmed has noted the place of collective feelings in the making of community; how emotions of love for one another, depend upon and are reflected in hate for others.<sup>29</sup>

Amongst my interlocutors, it was the wider sense of liminality, of waiting and wistfulness when living together and a sense of loss and ambivalence in nuclear life that established them as middle-class but also differentiated them from others. Their conflicting emotions, on the one hand, reflected their desire for, and conformity with, metanarratives of modernity and, on the other hand, differentiated them from groups above and below them. As I elaborate in the next section, their conflicting feelings and overall sense of liminality gave them moral authenticity while questioning the behaviour of and distancing those who did not fit these standards.

### **Romance, love and morality**

As mentioned earlier, in upwardly-mobile and new middle-class circles, arranged marriages are the norm, and social rules dictate that there should be no relations between men and women outside of marriage. In practise, usually but not always, premarital romances are tacitly accepted, as long as the couple are discreet and does not disrupt the social rule, and it ends in marriage. I write this statement with caution; although many premarital romances result in marriage or end uneventfully, the threat of violence against the couple, especially women, under the trope of “honour” is ever-present.<sup>30</sup> Notions of community and family honour as vested in female bodies, common to other parts of South Asia, are evidenced in the limited mobility and close surveillance of women in public areas.<sup>31</sup> Women are encouraged to study, usually in single-sex institutions, and often hold graduate degrees but rarely work, and are usually chaperoned, by men or sometimes elder women, when going outside the house. Female education, as noticed elsewhere in South Asia, serves in attracting affluent suitors of good status and is of value in ensuring the well-being of children.<sup>32</sup> For young women, like my interlocutors, a premarital liaison is fraught with tensions about betraying their family, the consequences if they are caught and the damage to their reputation if it does not successfully end in marriage. At the same time, given that marriage is the prescribed future of all, many desire to know and choose the man with whom they will spend their life. These aspirations and desires are further fuelled by local television dramas, Bollywood films and women’s digests, media that my informants avidly watch and read. And, many of them refer to the romance depicted in these stories to talk of their own desires for the right partner.



These desires for a romance, and a life centred on a couple, coexist with ideas of intimacy devised around a joint family. In this section, I want to think of the ways in which these attitudes towards intimacy come together in the emotions and experiences of pre-marital relationships. To pick up a theme introduced earlier, the nineteenth-century shift in colonial India from romantic love as a domain outside marriage to, ideally imagined, within is often associated with parallel transformations in literary and aesthetic styles. Orsini argues that by the end of the nineteenth century, love letters, as presented in social novels and in the social imaginary, became a 'medium of intimate communication' which carved out space 'for a private sphere of emotions', distanced from the 'demands of family and society'.<sup>33</sup> By contrasting this new genre of letters with older forms, she illustrates changes in the notion of love itself. Love letters in Persian manuals and masnavis, through a repertoire of metaphors, phrases and motifs, expressed emotions of love that stood for cultivated nobility, refined sensibility and an individuality conforming to the set ideals within a courtly milieu.<sup>34</sup> In contrast, nineteenth century representations deployed older motifs but, through subtle narrative shifts, to put forth a notion of love that stood against family and society and represented a sense of individuation.<sup>35</sup> The analysis is largely confined to literary representations, but it is instructive to 'think with' contemporary media that have potential for and provide privacy for 'intimate communication'.<sup>36</sup>

Much like the anxieties around female literacy in colonial India, with its potential for secret letter-writing between men and women, mobile phones and social media are a source of considerable tension in Lahore. Like in other contexts where interaction between the sexes is restricted, the possibilities of transgression introduced by mobile phone are frequently lamented and discussed in relation to declining moral standards, loss of parental authority and respect for traditional values.<sup>37</sup> For the younger generation, especially my female interlocutors, mobiles and online platforms, such as Facebook and chat, offer both new and exciting avenues but also create anxieties about reputation. On the one hand, such media gives them opportunities to 'meet' men and also a chance to converse freely but, on the other hand, it causes anxieties about being cat fished or being played around. The concern here is on the consequences on their marriage prospects if it became known that they had engaged in frivolous alliances. As I have written elsewhere, often, fears of pretence and false identity means that women do not use Facebook or random dialling to 'meet' men and, instead, pursue romances amongst existing family and social circles.<sup>38</sup> In practice, this means initial contact – often, just looking at each other or very limited conversation – at a wedding or family gatherings followed, sometimes in immediate sequence, with a (surreptitious) exchange of phone numbers..

Whether or not phones were used to initiating relationship, they are invaluable for developing it further. Given the restrictions on female mobility, the bulk of the communication and conversation in a romance takes place over the phone. The general lack of privacy in middle-class homes; shared rooms and living spaces; meant that many of my informants often hid in the kitchen or bathroom late at night to speak with their partners. Others took sisters into their confidence and spoke on the phone, in whispers, with them present in the same room. Some women admitted that they would pretend to be unwell when their family was going out of the house so that they had an excuse to stay back and could speak on the phone. Mobile phones, in this context act as 'medium of intimate communication' and, as Orsini speaks of love

letters ‘carve out a personal sphere for emotions’. For my informants, they offer a space to act on desires and hopes that are otherwise constrained by familial obligations and expectations.

Yet, even though mobile phones provide space to act on individual aspirations, the codes and rules of engagement of these romantic liaisons are such that it is difficult to position them as against the expectations of family and society. I illustrate my argument through an extended focus on the example of one informant, Sehrish, who met Asif at a family wedding. Sehrish’s family was distantly related to the groom and they, along with other friends and relatives, had gathered at his house to go together in a procession to the bride’s home. She was waiting with her mother outside the house, as her brother went to bring the car over, when she saw that a good looking man across the road was staring at her. He was also part of the groom’s procession but Sehrish had never seen him before. She pretended that she had not noticed him, but surreptitiously continued to watch him. After a short period, the man came over, accompanied by his mother and sister. His mother introduced herself to Sehrish’s mother – they spoke of how they knew the groom’s family and discovered mutual friends and extended relatives – and, after a few minutes of talking, offered to give them a lift as they were all going to the same venue. During the car journey, both mothers continued to converse. Serhrish and Asif spoke no words to each other but their eyes kept meeting in the reflection of the rear view mirror. The families parted when they reached the wedding but, when Sehrish went to get a cup of tea from the drinks stall, Asif appeared next to her and offered to pour it for her. In the process, he slipped a chit with his phone number between the saucer and cup.

A couple of weeks after the wedding, Sehrish decided to call him back. She had, of course, had many misgivings; she explained that she had been raised well by her family, and was not ‘the type of girl’ to act in an immoral or improper manner. ‘There were girls like that in my college, they were always going on with men, always on the phone with them, I was never like that, I did not behave like that, never “made eyes” with the boy hanging outside our college entrance’. However, at the same time, she had always dreamed of meeting someone she would fall in love with and marry, and Asif appeared to have the qualities she desired in a husband. ‘I had thought he was very good looking ... also he was not overly forward or “frank”, I had liked how he had been so proper’. So, she decided to call and find out more about him.

In that first phone call, Sehrish and Asif found out more on each other’s educational and family background, and about his employment. ‘I asked him about where he had studied and what degree he had, he also asked me the same, and then I found out about where he worked, what his father did’. In finding out these things, Sehrish’ objective was to ascertain whether Asif came from a ‘good background’ and whether he was sincere in his attentions towards her. She said, ‘I wanted to know he comes from a good family, he has a stable job and good habits ... not like how, these days, so many men do not do any work, whiling away time drinking and playing around with women’. Sehrish was equally clear on establishing her own moral credentials, ‘I was almost stern in the beginning, told him he should not have given me his number because I was not that ‘kind of girl’, and I was not interested in ‘timepass’.

Sehrish’ response reflects many of these qualities of restraint and reasoned thinking that reflect and are associated with middle-class values. To link back to Pernau’s

analysis of middle-class development, it represents a schooling and disciplining of passions. She was excited by her encounter with Asif but proceeded with caution, trying to first ascertain his intentions and whether he came from an appropriate background. Her actions reflect concerns about the future; for women in her circles as in urban Pakistan more broadly, marriage is also means of achieving economic security. Sehrish concerns about his family background show that, despite the excitement, fear and anticipation she felt, she also restrained herself to think about the future. She was also careful in displaying these aspects of herself and her family's values to Asif, so that he does not think she is improper. Nor did he share too much of herself, in order to not come across as morally lax. These attributes were not only used to express her own identity and values, but also to differentiate herself from others who were not as careful. Note, for instance, how she scoffs at the 'girls in college who were always talking to men' or insists that she is 'not that type of girl'. Paralleling Pernau, on emotions as grounds for both inclusion and exclusion, and Sara Ahmad, on hate for others being a result of love's within the group, here the lack of proper morality in others becomes a way that Sehrish displays her own values, identity and morality.

However, if Sehrish establishes her morality through her restrained, a simultaneous discourse of excess gives her authenticity. Reflecting upon those initial days of conversing with Asif, Sehrish told me how she was 'overwhelmed' by her emotions at the time. 'You feel so much all at once, I was overcome with feelings'. So much so, that she found it difficult to describe her emotions. 'You know what it is like, you feel like you are dying all the time'. She said that, in those days, she had been happier than she had ever been before, but also fearful and sad; 'I would think what if this does not last, I get caught and my family harsh with me, or that he would change his mind ... and that it might not last'. She continued, 'when I would think about being separated from him forever, or not spending time with him, it would be so painful'. Many others, in similar situation as Sehrish, recounted the pain they felt, how they would think of their beloved all the time and, often, spend hours listening to Bollywood songs and *gazals* on their mobile phones with the lights turned off.

This excess of feeling and unrestrained emotions, so unlike the stories of caution, were often presented as proof of moral authenticity. It was precisely because this experience was so new, and unlike anything else before, that it elicited such tumultuous emotions. Comparing herself to others, Sehrish said, 'I had never done anything like this, nor would I have if I hadn't been taken over by my feelings ... there was something about him 'rah na gaya' (I couldn't stop myself)'. It is this overflow of feeling, or lack of control, that serves as a way of distinguishing herself and her morality. It speaks of purity of her intentions, and differentiates her from others who may indulge in romances all the time. If restraint and caution are ways of belonging to the moral community, the simultaneous excess of feelings is the justifiable impetus for breaking its behavioural codes. In many ways, it establishes a person as following emotions that are unadulterated by worldly codes and concerns and, in that respect, devoid of material interests. Here, the rationality and forward-thinking that is usually the hallmark of middle-class sensibilities is downplayed. In being led by her unrestrained emotions, 'rah na gaya', Sehrish was differentiating herself from other groups and classes who, according to her, cared for only money and, thus, are capable of pretence and guile to trap a well-to-do man.

Sehrish's description, of simultaneous restraint and excess of emotion, is typical of accounts of romantic pursuits narrated by my informants. Central in this narration, and those of many other women, is the emphasis on making the 'right' choice. Through subtle cues from appearance, mannerisms and educational background, women attempt to quickly ascertain whether the man is interested in a serious commitment and whether he is 'husband material'.<sup>39</sup> Simultaneously, an excess of emotions – of 'feeling too much' – restores the authenticity of their actions; that they were not calculated or worldly strategies but indicative of the purity of their intentions. These sets of emotions are oppositional, but work in tandem to uphold, rather than challenge, prescribed social ideals of morality and personal responsibility. This leads us to consider questions on the role of individual agency, and the shape that it takes in this setting. I turn to this discussion in the next section.

### **Agency, emotions and liminality**

It can be argued that this emphasis on making the 'right' choice and on only pursuing romances that lead to marriage is a narrative device, a form of public self-representation deployed to protect reputation. As Carey notes of Morocco, intimate alliances are packed with uncertainty about the intentions of those involved.<sup>40</sup> While leaving space for ambiguity in the intentions of my interlocutors, the larger argument that I put forth is that concerns of morality and self-representation offer a frame – a set of codes and cues – that guide conduct and communication in premarital romances in middle-class settings in Lahore. The protestations about 'not being that type of girl' and 'my family does not allow this' followed by repeated insistences of sincerity of intentions by the men acts as foreplay in new relationships and, as I just explain, is recalled with excitement later on.

These protestations are part of an established pattern that guides not only the chronology of the relationship but also the emotions around it. For my female informants, it provides a 'structure of feeling'.<sup>41</sup> Like Sehrish, many women became visibly excited or animated when telling me how they had rebuked when first approached by the men they had eventually married. Similarly, many spoke of it to explain the fear that they felt at the time or how they had felt overwhelmed. The insistence on 'not being that type of girl' may just be a ploy, intended to safeguard reputation, but it gives voice, structure and meaning to the feelings experienced when approached romantically. Moreover, it is precisely because of the feelings, captured by 'not that type of girl', that they were approached or had appeared attractive in the first place. Most women told me that their (now) husbands had liked them, sometimes at first glance, because they had appeared 'innocent and moral'. As one woman put it: 'he told me that he had liked me so much when he saw me because I looked so innocent and then when I told him that I was scared of speaking to him because my family would not like it, it convinced him that I was the one for him'.

Intimate encounters depend on women taking action, often in secrecy and against the family, and thus demonstrate a sense of agency, as theorised in liberal discourse, that can be labelled as resistance to structure.<sup>42</sup> Yet the immense focus on 'not being that kind of girl' subsumes that agency. The morality that makes a woman desired and worthy of male attention is that aligns with life within the extended family rather than stand in opposition to it. These connections are sometimes explicitly discussed. For instance, many women feel that their 'understanding' happened because their own values and morals matched with the man's family. Similarly, echoing a discourse of

'expectations' found in Delhi, others remark that their love was strong because they understood and respected their partner's duties towards his family, and would not complain about it.<sup>43</sup> These discussions about how well a woman will gel with the man's extended family was often a point of conversation and fantasy over the phone. A number of my informants told me that, during their 'understanding' days, their partners would tell them that they imagine them living in their family house, and taking part in daily activities and celebrations. Speaking of the time, Aymen said, 'back then, when you are apart from each other all the time, you always miss the person, think how it would be to part of their lives'. She continued, 'we would speak on the phone late at night and he would tell me how much he missed me or that he was always imagining me being part of his family'. Later on, she laughingly told me, 'like on Eid, he would say things like what clothes he would have got me if was there, I would make sure you get more Eidi than all the women in the house'. The images of domesticity speak of the intensity and strength of feelings between the couple, but are talked and presented in a manner in which the extended family is close at hand, giving legitimacy and recognition to the couple.

In this respect, these images of domesticity align with Dwyer's analysis of shifts in representation of love in Bollywood films where, catering to the new middle-class culture, intimacy between a couple is placed *within* rather than out of the family.<sup>44</sup> The sense that family is important in forging an intimate and personal connection between two people is also expressed in ideas on blood and familiarity. The idea that 'shared blood' leads to innate connectivity between family members is common in middle-class circles and many women drew upon it when discussing how to strengthen the bond between a couple. 'No matter how you feel about the man's family, the truth is that it his blood, and no one can reject their blood,' a woman explained. 'Think of yourself, you might be irritated with your mother but if someone said something against her, you would not stand for it, it's the same for men'. Building upon such ideas, many women feel that extending yourself for the man's family and their comfort strengthens the bond between the couple. The 'traditional' idea, of female sacrifice for the good of the collective, is reworked in that it is viewed as labour towards a desired intimacy within a couple, but without disturbing obligations towards family and kin.

The agency that is visible in romantic encounters may appear as challenging existing norms but it breaks down these underlying structures that guide moral life – family, dignity, love – by combining them. And, in the process, my interlocutors reformulated and restructured the same ideas and ideals that their initial actions oppose and challenge. Typically, the breaking down of old structures in liminal phases lead to the formation of new codes and norms. Yet the emotional liminality, that I have described, is continuous and breaks down and recreates the same structures by combining them together in intimate desires and the emotions that they incite.

### **Consumption, intimacy and modernity**

So far in this article, I have discussed the ways in which two modes of intimacy – between a couple and around a family – are combined in intimate experiences and

emotions, even as they simultaneously broken down and recreated. I now want to turn towards spaces in which these ideas of togetherness separate. In particular, I highlight how, in marital life, consumption becomes a way to create intimacy between a couple and to mark it as distinct from the wider joint family. Consumption, in this setting, was used to rework concepts and relations in a manner that prioritised and separated nuclear life. Amongst my interlocutors, this was visible in how the described what it meant to have a ‘caring’ spouse. As noted elsewhere, rather than usage of the English word ‘love’ or its most direct Urdu equivalent, i.e., ‘piyar’ or ‘mohabbat’, English words, such as ‘caring’ are often to describe a loving partner. Its meaning is highly gendered, and continuous with the traditional roles cast on men and women, but also reworked in terms of the centrality that it gives to consumption.

For instance, in describing how she had caring husband, a woman described, ‘he provides for all our wants, whatever I ask for, whatever is required for children, he makes sure it is fulfilled ... my husband, doesn’t say much, I tease him that sometimes he should express with his mouth also, but this is his “care”’. Her comments reflect the how her husband’s ability to provide for her and children was central to his ‘care’. And, although the ability to provide was not everything – notice the slight wistfulness with which she mentioned his lack of expressiveness – many of their small intimacies were contingent on it. She would often mention, how unlike her parents who hardly ever visited restaurants, her husband and her often went to have soup or pizza in the evenings. Or, that regardless of how tired he was, he would take her out shopping – they would often go to new mega-stores such as Hyperstar or Metro to stroll around and window shop. Similarly, care was shown through sending children to private schools, often followed by tuition academies, dressing them in new clothes and providing them with the right snacks and taking them to children-centered restaurants like McDonalds and KFC on weekends. A husband’s ‘care’, rested not just in an ability to provide but the provision of exactly these kinds of modern amenities.

In turn, women showed their care through looking after the needs of her husband and children, but this too was rendered in particular forms of consumption and investment towards a modern life-style. Going back to the same example I had given earlier, while her husband showed his care by providing, the woman responded by looking after him – always making sure, as she told me, that his clothes were ready and pressed and that she hung them outside the bathroom even before he asked. Following her around the house, as she went on her daily tasks and I, very uncharitably watched on asking questions, what was noticeable was not just the long hours that went into her ‘care’ but also the attentiveness to the use of the right products. Her husband’s white shirts and children’s uniforms were washed with a relatively expensive detergent, manufactured by Proctor & Gamble and frequently advertised on television as restoring clothes to whitest of white, after which the box was safely stored away in larger airtight box. She spent considerable time in the kitchen cooking; her new mixer-grinder was used frequently but always put back in the original packing and the micro wave still had its plastic packing. Similarly, her youngest, less than a year old, was given an expensive formula milk and wore pampers, and her older child, a pre-schooler, would always be given snacks like chicken nuggets, again advertised heavily on television, and instant noodles. An effort was also made to encourage him to speak more in English than Urdu, so her conversation with him was peppered with considerably more English words than normal and I was also encouraged to speak to him in ‘proper English’.

It was therefore through attentiveness to the right kind of consumption, accompanied by an investment in a 'modern' future that the woman was forging together an intimacy, that was wholly centred around her nuclear family.<sup>45</sup> It imagines a present and projects a teleological future, a nuclear family progressing towards modernity. This is a vision removed from the responsibilities and emotions connected to extended kin and family. Moreover, as I have discussed elsewhere, consumption allows the nuclear family to distinguish itself from others in the joint setup and to create boundaries. Notice the way my interlocutor, discussed above, made it a point to use an expensive washing detergent for her husband. But, she told me once, she used an ordinary detergent for the laundry duties she performed for the rest of the extended family. Similarly, the fact that she could give her own children chicken nuggets as snacks made her feel that she was able to give them something that, perhaps, other households in the joint setup were not doing for their family. Going to shopping malls and supermarkets with her husband afforded her the privacy to talk and eat alone that was not available at home and. At the same time, it enables them to perform a modernity that they aspire towards that only has space for a nuclear family.

### **Conclusion**

In the context of South Asia, embourgeoisement is often traced back to socioeconomic transformations engendered by colonial rule, in particular the introduction of state employment as profession and social status, and is associated with an ethos of rationality, self-discipline and restraint.<sup>46</sup> Recent historical work on emotions has nuanced this understanding, urging us to think of these processes not as devoid of passions and feelings but, rather as, constituting a particular kind of 'feeling' community.<sup>47</sup> Here, I have drawn upon this conceptualisation with the aim of problematizing the association of middle-class life with a linear move towards individuation. While others have also pointed towards the centrality of family in contemporary middle-class life, I have focused on the ways in which ideas on intimacy between a couple and that around an extended family coexist. Through a focus on feelings, I have unravelled the emotional liminality that is produced and practiced as women confront conflicting demands and desires in their intimate lives. Rather than this liminality giving way to new norms and codes, it is regenerated and reproduced continuously, and is performed for self-representation and identification, as well as to differentiate oneself and community from others. The conflict and tensions between the differing modes of intimacy are never resolved. It is not the shift towards individualised ties that makes the middle-class, but rather the continual invoking of these oppositional demands and the feelings that they generate.

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<sup>1</sup> Abeyasekera, "Narratives of Choice;" Mody, *The Intimate State*; Uberoi, *Family, Kinship, and Marriage in India, Freedom and Destiny*; Grover, "Lived Experiences;" Ahearn, *Invitations to Love*; Srivastava, *Sexual Sites, Seminal Attitudes*; Osella "Desires Under Reform;" Donner & Santos, "Love and Intimate Citizenship;" Ganguly Scrase & Scrase, *Globalisation and the Middle Classes*; Mazarella, "Citizens have Sex;" Hoek, *Cut Pieces*; Dwyer, *All you Want is Money*.

<sup>2</sup> See, for instance, Osella's critique of Parry's use of Antony Giddens to refer to shifts from arranged to pure relationships in India, Osella, "Desires Under Reform," 244. See also Donner & Santos, "Love and Intimate Citizenship."

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- <sup>3</sup> Dwyer, *All you Need is Money*, “Kiss or Tell.” For a larger discussion on conversations on love as a way of talking of a break from the past, see Marsden, “Love and Elopement,” 97; Cole & Thomas, “Thinking Through Love,” 15; Collier, *From Duty to Desire*; Menin “The Impasse of Modernity,” 898-899.
- <sup>4</sup> Mody, *The Intimate State*; Abeyasekera, “Narratives of Choice;” de Neve, “Economies of Love.”
- <sup>5</sup> Orsini, *Love in South Asia*; Majumdar, *Marriage and Modernity*; Sreevinas, *Wives Widows and Concubines*.
- <sup>6</sup> McKinnon, “Vital Relations;” Davidoff & Hall, *Family Fortunes*.
- <sup>7</sup> Turner, “Frame, Flow and Reflection,” 465.
- <sup>8</sup> Thomassen, *Liminality and the Modern*; Armbrust, *Martyrs and Tricksters*; Griffith et al, “Migration, Time and Temporality”; Elliot et al, *Methodologies of Mobility*; Ali, “Go West Young Man”; Osella and Osella, “Marriage, Money and Masculinity”.
- <sup>9</sup> Appadurai, *Modernity at Large*.
- <sup>10</sup> Pernau, “Feeling Communities.”
- <sup>11</sup> Beatty, “Anthropology and Emotion,” “Current Emotion Research in Anthropology.”
- <sup>12</sup> The research was funded by ESRC Future Research Leaders Fellowship, 2014-2017.
- <sup>13</sup> Osella & Osella, *Social Mobility in Kerala*; Donner, “One’s Own Marriage;” Fuller & Narasimhan, “Companionate Marriage in India;” Osella, “Desires Under Reform.”
- <sup>14</sup> Donner, “One’s Own Marriage;” Fuller & Narasimhan, “Companionate Marriage in India.”
- <sup>15</sup> Walsh, *Domesticity in Colonial India*, 68
- <sup>16</sup> Chakravarti, *Rewriting History*, 212
- <sup>17</sup> Orsini, *Love in South Asia*, 30-31.
- <sup>18</sup> *ibid*, 31.
- <sup>19</sup> Mody, *The Intimate State*; Abeyasekera, “Narratives of Choice.”
- <sup>20</sup> de Neve, “Economies of Love.”
- <sup>21</sup> Majumdar, *Marriage Modernity*, 57
- <sup>22</sup> Maqsood, “Buying Modern,” *The New Pakistani Middle Class*.
- <sup>23</sup> For comparative experiences on the failed promise of education in South Asia, see Jeffrey, *Timepass*; Jeffrey et al, “When Schooling Fails;” Brown, “From Guru Gama to Punchi Italia.”
- <sup>24</sup> Osella & Osella, *Social Mobility in Kerala*.
- <sup>25</sup> c.f. Marsden & Ibanez-Tirado, “Repertoires of Family Life.”
- <sup>26</sup> de Neve, “Economies of Love;” McKinnon, *Vital Relations*.
- <sup>27</sup> Mody, *The Intimate State*.
- <sup>28</sup> Pernau, “Love and Compassion”, 23.
- <sup>29</sup> Ahmed, “Collective Feelings”.
- <sup>30</sup> Violence against women, under the trope of “honour”, has been on the rise in both rural and urban Pakistan. Love marriages, without the approval of families, often incite such violence – in 2014, a woman was stoned to death by a crowd outside the Lahore High court and in 2017, a woman was shot dead by her brother outside the court. Aurat Foundation, a local NGO, estimated that, in 2014, at least a thousand women were killed in the name of “honor” (<https://www.dawn.com/news/1108900>).
- <sup>31</sup> Das 1995.
- <sup>32</sup> Still, “Spoiled Brides.”
- <sup>33</sup> Orsini, *Love in South Asia*, 239, 235, 241.



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<sup>34</sup> *ibid*, 234

<sup>35</sup> *ibid*, 235

<sup>36</sup> Lévi-Strauss, *Totemism* 89.

<sup>37</sup> See also Menin, “The Impasse of Modernity;” Collier, *From Duty to Desire*.

<sup>38</sup> Author. (full reference to be included after review to ensure anonymity)

<sup>39</sup> For similar experiences elsewhere, see Elliot, “The Makeup of Destiny”.

<sup>40</sup> Carey, “The “Rules” in Morocco”.

<sup>41</sup> Williams, *Drama from Ibsen to Brecht*, 17; *The Long Revolution*, chapter 2

<sup>42</sup> Mahmood, “Feminist Theory”.

<sup>43</sup> Uberoi & Tyagi, “Learning to Adjust”.

<sup>44</sup> Dwyer, *All you Need is Money*, “Kiss or Tell.”

<sup>45</sup> Osella, “Desires Under Reform”.

<sup>46</sup> Alavi, “Social Forces”; Metcalf, *Islamic Revival*; Naim, “Prize Winning”; Daechsel *Politics of Self Expression*.

<sup>47</sup> Pernau “Feeling Communities”.

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