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Feminist mediations: The sacred and the secular in the work of three Pakistani female singers

ABSTRACT

This article is situated within cultural, performance, political and feminist theory. It looks at the place of women singers in Pakistan and assesses their mediation of secular and sacred spaces, providing some understanding of the impact of women in Pakistani culture. A secondary aim of this article is to help dislodge some pervasive stereotypes in the West about the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, its culture and its women, while encouraging a self-critical move on the part of the Pakistani state and its citizenry to help halt the dangerous turn towards a regressive Islamist national politics.

KEYWORDS

affect
performance
Sufi
Pakistan
feminist
queer

... Everything falls in the dust of the dead
When the people set their violins
And looking forward interrupt and sing,
Interrupt the hatred of shadows and watchdogs
Sing and wake the stars with their song....

(Neruda 1976)

The titles of articles and op-eds in major newspapers and magazines in the United States tell the story of how Pakistan is viewed in American society today. Thus, for example, *Vanity Fair*, a popular magazine read widely by Americans of all backgrounds, published an essay by the well-known journalist and cultural commentator Christopher Hitchens in 2001 with the fear-inducing title, 'On the frontier of apocalypse'. A decade later, Hitchens continued in the same vein, arguing in an impassioned piece for *Vanity Fair* in June 2011 that 'to continue the policy of engagement with Pakistan is delusional, shameful and ultimately self-defeating for the government of the USA' (2011: n.p.).

Nicholas Kristof, whose op-eds in the *New York Times* are even more widely read, focuses largely on Pakistan's poor and downtrodden women. A *New York Times* online video by him from 30 November 2008 is called *On the Ground with Nicholas Kristoff – Acid Attacks* – clearly drawing the attention of readers to the women victims of these awful attacks. He writes, 'Westerners associate terrorism in Pakistan with suicide bombers, but the real emerging terrorist threat for Pakistani women is being disfigured by acid attacks, often by their husbands' (Kristof 2008: n.p.).

While Hitchens and Kristof make some valid observations, they tell only half the story of a part of the world and of its female population that has become so important in the public imagination everywhere, particularly in the West. Some of the assumptions I would like readers to question are whether Pakistan is simply a terrorist state (Hitchens 2011) or its female citizens uniformly the victims of religious, state, societal and familial oppression (Kristof 2008). The ideas I would like to begin broaching in this article are part of what I hope will inform a full-length documentary film on Pakistani women singers (which is currently in its preview-preparation stage funded by a grant from the National Endowment of the Humanities in the United States), as well as a more general book on Pakistani popular culture. The film project aims to provide a somewhat different view of Pakistan's rich cultural past and present, which connects Pakistan and its people, including and especially its women, to the larger comity of nations. Thus, with my film (which I am working on currently with documentary film-maker Kathleen Foster), I hope to build a cultural bridge with an important ally of the United States, treating American and other western audiences to a new perspective of an ancient culture, through the views and lives and beautiful, universally accessible music of some of its most accomplished and well-known female singers. In the article that follows, I will first point out some of the methodological and thematic issues that will form the core of the study, which will eventually be shaped into the full-length documentary film on Pakistani women singers.

In the remainder of the article, I will address some basic ideological commonalities in the *oeuvre* of Madame Noor Jehan, aka The Melody Queen (1926–2000), Abida Parveen (1954–) and Deeyah (1977–), aka the Muslim Madonna, that might help us bridge the gap between the so-called secular and sacred divides represented in their music, which spans three different generations and multiple genres, and to understand and appreciate the significance of these female singers and their music to not just the realm of Pakistani culture, but to Muslim political discourse as well.

It is not inaccurate to claim that by telling the stories of Pakistani women singers and musicians, one can convey the complex and evolving nature of gender, class and religious issues in Pakistan today, where the struggle for its soul is being waged by religious extremists on the one hand, and by many of

its cultural artists who stand openly for progressive, democratic and secular values on the other. Clearly, ideas about the secular versus the sacred have taken root in the minds of people around the world, as representing opposed sides in the conflicts of our time, whether in Pakistan or elsewhere. While further investigation may reveal such lines to be blurry at best, it seems to me apposite to explore the work of the female singers of Pakistan as shaped by these twin imperatives that have fashioned their careers. The secular is represented by Madame Noor Jehan, aka the Melody Queen, and others who have followed her trajectory such as Tassawur Khanum, Nazia Hassan, Nanyara Noor; the religious or sacred is represented by Abida Parveen, with the much younger Pakistani-Norwegian singer Deeyah (dubbed the Muslim Madonna by the British tabloid *The Sun*), both serving as examples of singers who challenge through their music (and in the case of Abida Parveen, through their physical appearance) the separation of these two poles of the sacred and the secular.

Presenting and analysing the lives and contributions of such a diverse group of female singers from Pakistan requires, methodologically, a broad-based politico-cultural and performance studies approach, which sheds light on an entire culture and society through the gendered lens of its female singers and performers. In *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari (1987) use the concept of stratification to explain the ordering of the natural world. Stratification is 'beneficial in many respects and unfortunate in many others [...] [Strata] consist of giving forms to matters, imprisoning intensities or locking singularities into systems of resonance and redundancy' (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 40). Stratification is thus an ideal concept for discussing the many dichotomies, such as secular and sacred or male and female, that are intertwined and inverted through the affective nature of the performances of these women. By analysing the 'strata' of the lives, the travails and the triumphs of these women via a series of interviews live and recorded that situate them geographically (in different regions and provinces of Pakistan, rural and urban, and in its diaspora) as well as historically (incorporating singers from days gone by as well as recent times) and across musical genres, what will emerge is a 'stratified' socio-historical canvas of Pakistan that is not your usual history-from-above.

Viewing images from films and concert clips as well as music videos of these and other singers of Pakistani background, we see how the lines between male and female personas often become blurred (Abida Parveen, for instance, is very masculine), as do the lines between secular and sacred (many 'secular' songs both in lyrics and performance style invoke sacred/Sufi references and vice versa). Deleuze's conclusions in *Proust and Signs* (1972) support my contentions regarding the power of musical performance to subvert 'normal' – and normative – power dynamics and relationships. Deleuze explains that

signs are empty, but this emptiness confers upon them a ritual perfection, a kind of formalism that we do not encounter elsewhere. The worldly signs are the only ones capable of causing a kind of nervous exaltation, expressing the effect upon us of the persons capable of producing them.

He also explains that musical 'signs' would thus seem to offer an explanation for the cultural power wielded by matriarchs such as Madame Noor Jehan through their music's ability to induce active participation from their

1. A more comprehensive look at the recent examinations of affect and its theoretical implications is available by examining Patricia Clough's *The Affective Turn* (2007), Jill Bennett's *Emphatic Vision: Affect, Trauma, and Contemporary Art* (2005), Judith Butler's *Precarious Life, Vulnerability, and the Ethics of Cohabitation* (2012) and Sara Ahmed's *The Promise of Happiness* (2010).

audiences (Deleuze 1972: 7). Deleuze ascribes the most significant signs to the world of art:

the world of art is the ultimate world of signs, and these signs ... find their meaning in an ideal essence. Henceforth, the world revealed by art reacts on all the others, and notably the sensuous signs; it integrates them, colors them with an esthetic meaning and imbues what was still opaque about them.

(1972: 13)

While Deleuze is speaking generally about art, it is reasonable to conclude that the revealing nature of musical performance art is doubly potent because of its inherent propensity for active communication between performer and audience. Such imagery, palpable both visually and within the lyrics, musical structure and performance style of the songs sung and performed by Pakistani female singers, suggests that the religion of Islam in the Pakistani context has never been synonymous with terrorism and intolerance, but rather with the pleasure, excitement and beauty of music worldwide. Clearly, many cultural critics' and women singers' own comments on their lives and contributions to the culture of music strengthen this view and also give the lie to extremists' claims (and some people's perceptions) that music is *haram* (forbidden in Islam), or that Muslim women in particular cannot or should not sing and dance.

PAKISTANI WOMEN SINGERS AS AFFECT ALIENS

It seems to me that a transnational connection, or emotional and cognitive bonding across temporal and spatial borders, is or should be a most obvious outcome of the recent affective turn in feminist theory.¹ I contend that singers like Madame Noor Jehan, Abida Parveen and Deeyah, by bearing witness to Pakistani and Pakistani-diasporic history through songs, both secular and sacred, that bridge mind/ body, earthly and divine desire, the sensual and the spiritual, the immanent and the transcendent, self/ other, and the personal and the politico-historical divides or borders, instantiate the ethical imperative that feminist 'affect' theorist Patricia Clough (reading Spinoza), underscores as a crucial component of the recent 'affective turn' in critical theory. According to another noted scholar, Michael Hardt, 'The turn to human affects, indicates a shift in the way we think about the human condition'. Such a shift requires a synthesis in our thinking about the world, and about our own critical languages of analysis, a mind/body synthesis that has been lacking in western critical theory up to the recent present. Thus,

affects refer equally to the body and the mind ... they involve both reason and the passions. Affects require us, as the term suggests, to enter the realm of causality, but they offer a complex view of causality because the affects belong simultaneously to both sides of the causal relationship. They illuminate, in other words, both our power to affect the world around us and our power to be affected by it, along with the relationship between these two powers.

(Hardt 2007: ix)

By helping us as viewers and listeners to experience, then, in both our bodily responses and our rational minds (this synthesis being the realm of Affect)

their own experience of being 'affect aliens', these singers and their music effects a certain 'queering' of Islam, which is surely the transnational need of the day and has roots in a non-normative and heterodox history of Islam that these women have been helping to mediate in the context of the Pakistani nation state, from 1947 to the present day.

What do I mean by 'queering of Islam' and how might this turn of phrase – and feeling – be related to these female singers' experience of being 'affect aliens'? What is an affect alien?

Inhabiting the psychic space of an 'affect alien' is predicated on what critic Sara Ahmed refers to as a queering of the 'happy objects' endpoint of heteronormative desire that is foisted upon citizens of the modern nation state.² The 'happy objects' landscape that modern nation states hold out as a utopian promise for their model/preferred (heteronormative) citizenry is based on the simultaneous disavowal of rights of citizenship to 'minorities' and 'others' who are marked as 'different' from the normative, loyal, ideal citizen because of their sexuality, gender, ethnicity or religious affiliations. Looking at the case of three recently murdered female singer/performers of the North Western Frontier Province of Pakistan described below, neither state nor federal protection was offered to them in the face of threats of murder, and nor was retributive justice meted out to the assassins after their killings. The three women were killed as a result of the unhappy confluence of patriarchal traditions of 'honour' (which forbid women, seen as possessions of their men folk, from performing in public lest they bring shame to the household; such 'traditions' are particularly entrenched in these tribal regions of the country), coupled with increasingly extremist interpretations of Islam popularized by the ascent to power of the Pakistani Taliban (TTP) in northern areas of the country. These female performers thus became 'affect aliens' within the Pakistani nation state:

- According to the *Express Tribune Pakistan*, Ghazala Javed, 24, in June 2012, was visiting a beauty parlour for pre-show preparations. When she left the salon with her father, two unknown armed men riding a motor-bike fired at her. Ghazala received six bullet wounds and her father four. The singer was pronounced dead at arrival at the Lady Reading Hospital (LRH). Ghazala Javed was a Pakhtun singer belonging to the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) province. She was considered to be a leader in reviving and promoting female singing within the KPK province following the Taliban insurgency. She was nominated for a Filmfare Award in 2010 and received a Khyber Award in 2011.
- A singer-dancer named Shabana was killed in brutal fashion and her body left out to rot in the Market Square known as 'Khooni Chowk'/Bloody Square by the Taliban in the city of Mingora in Swat in April of 2009 (Afzal-Khan 2009: n.p.).³
- Aiman Udas was a singer and songwriter in Peshawar, Pakistan. Udas had frequently performed on PTV television and AVT Khyber, a private Pashto channel in Pakistan. In 2009, she was shot dead in her apartment in Peshawar, allegedly by her brothers. Her final song was titled, 'I died but still live among the living, because I live on in the dreams of my lover'. (Afzal-Khan 2009: n.p.)

These women mediated between the world of beauty, song and 'happiness' on the one hand, and of suffering, alienation and death on the other, becoming

2. For more on happy objects and affect, see Ahmed (2010).
3. See Afzal-Khan 2009.

in the process 'affect aliens'. Aliens, that is, to the promise of happiness for all citizens embedded in the idealized promise of nation states, because of the failure, in the case of the Pakistani Islamic state, to actually live up to that discourse by extending justice and inclusion to all of its female citizenry that ought to have included these murdered singers. Yet, writes Ahmed, 'If injustice does have unhappy effects [creating "affect aliens"], then the story does not end there. Unhappiness is not our endpoint. If anything, the experience of being alienated from the affective promise of happy objects gets us somewhere' (Ahmed 2010).

Where such an experience of alienation gets us, partly through the blurring of the secular/sacred divide in the music and lives of Pakistani female singers, is to a state of mind and feeling I am calling the 'queering of Islam.' By helping us as viewers and listeners to experience, in both our bodily responses and our rational minds (this unified realm of Affect) their own experience of being 'affect aliens', these female singers and their music effect a certain 'queerness', an uncanny effect in us, when we encounter the 'live' bodies of the female singing 'others' in our midst, even, and perhaps ever more intensely, when these bodies have been brutally silenced.

While Ahmed is focused on analysing the situation/figure of the migrant postcolonial in the western metropolis in her own writing and theorizing, my article brings up the stories of three major women singers, two who live(d) and work(ed) squarely within the patriarchal national imaginary of post-partition Pakistan (Noor Jehan and Abida Parveen), and the third, Deeyah, being the diasporic figure of the killjoy feminist most akin to Ahmed's example of the first-generation British Indian football-playing heroine of the movie *Bend it Like Beckham* (Chadha, 2002). Deeyah's musical interventions in Norwegian national space open up uncomfortable questions for both the Muslim community's 'happy objects' landscape within Norway and that of the western racist and neo-imperialist discourse of 'happy multiculturalism' embraced uncritically by white western neo-liberal citizens in that country and elsewhere in Euro-America, which in reality exclude its Muslim citizens from the utopian promises of their adopted countries' nationalist discourse.

QUEERING ISLAM

For my own project, the female singers I describe herein are effecting a 'queering' of Islam, which is what is needed to help us move past the impasse of affective alienation described above, within both Muslim nations and secular western ones. But this queering of Islam can only be brought about through a re-conceptualization of politics as we understand it today. Ali Altaf Mian, in an essay about the Muslim philosopher Abu Nasr Farabi (D 950 CE), argues that this early Muslim thinker's work can help us move beyond the two equally problematic dominant ideological structures on which modern nation states, western and Muslim, rest: the liberal, rational, contractual nationalist state (western secular) and the feudal, spiritualistic, identitarian state (Islamist). The problem with both these conceptualizations of nation states is that they leave out the realm of the affective, or 'the realm of our psychic and social contingencies', that impinges on the establishment of nation states (Mian 2011: 66). Farabi, Aristotle, Freud and Kristeva are but some of the thinkers whose work in political theory and psychoanalysis, according to Mian's provocative reading, actually encourages us to move politically 'in ways that rationally and affectively disallow both identitarian affective politics and national rationalist

politics'. And from such disavowal we can more freely move into the realm of transnational affiliations and politics that I believe is the need of our times, a realm we enter when we recognize, with Kristeva (reading Freud), that 'difference' or the 'Uncanny, foreignness, is within us: we are our own foreigners, we are divided' (Mian 2011: 66). As Mian argues further:

What such a Freudian reading does to the nation-state is to offer a politics of our psychic and social contingencies for the establishment of the nation-state, in which reason/cognition travels alongside affect/emotion to address the different needs of the human in his or her political structures.

Such a journey, according to Kristeva, allows us to enter into 'into the strangeness of the other and of oneself, toward an ethics of respect for the irreconcilable' (2001: 66).

While I am cognizant of the limitations of assuming a Freudian universality to understand and challenge particular political problems and contradictions, Mian rightly, in my opinion, underscores the need to find critiques of contemporary forms of nation states that European imperial and colonial encounters bequeathed to the Third World at the time of postcolonial independences, out of which contemporary Muslim theology has also emerged. As Mian goes on to explain, 'Recent Muslim political theologians have reified models of the state that lack the sort of unison of reason/cognition and affect/emotion that Kristeva hints toward in her third model' (Mian 2011: 66).

In Farabi, Mian finds an example of a Muslim theologian and philosopher whose work encourages a cultivation of a politics grounded in a simultaneous emphasis on reason and affect, much, as I argue, do the Muslim Pakistani female singers I am discussing. Such a politics, expounded also in the political philosophy of Aristotle, is grounded in the fullness of human existence, that is, 'cognition, affectivity, and all that has to do with human bodies' (Mian 2011: 66–67). Such a comprehensive model for doing politics justly is encapsulated by Aristotle in his concept and practice of friendship. Here is Mian citing Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*: 'Friendship would seem to hold cities together, and legislators seem to be more concerned about it than about justice' (1999 cited in Mian: 67). If from such a statement one can conclude that friendship, in Aristotelian political philosophy, is as powerful a political asset as justice, we need to acknowledge that justice can flow only from a friendship between equals. As Mian argues:

What Aristotle says about friendship ... presents one way to think and act politics in the terrain of affect. Friendship should be brought into our thinking about governance in Muslim states. With renewed commitment to friendship, we can look for care and cognition, love and logic, compassion and contemplation, and so on, in the context of local and global politics.

(Mian 2011: 67)

The polemical gauntlet thrown down by Mian is one I argue as being exemplified through the lives and musical contributions of Pakistani female singers in the cultural imaginary of the Muslim Pakistani nation state. If we can enter the queer, the other, the different realm of friendship these female singers invite us to experience through their music and their life stories, we, as both

individual and state actors, can indeed 'look for care and cognition, love and logic, compassion and contemplation, in the context of local and global politics'. By doing so, I argue, we can help re-envision a better, more just and peaceful future for our shared world, both within Muslim nations like Pakistan and between the Muslim world and the West. Let us now turn to the case histories of Madame Noor Jehan, Abida Parveen and Deeyah, to better understand their offer of the kind of friendship Ali Mian has outlined as the basis upon which a re-conceptualization of Muslim politics can take hold.

MADAME NOOR JEHAN

Born Allah Wasai (God's gift) to a family of *mirasis* or musicians in the village of Kasur in what was then India in 1926, Noor Jehan went on to have an illustrious musical and performance career spanning seven decades, starting off as an Indian artist, and ending as a Pakistani citizen beloved of South Asian audiences across national and ethnic divides. Her singing career and life, which thus spanned the history of Pakistan from its creation until her death in 2000, defined, much like that of her Egyptian counterpart Umm Kulthoum, the epitome of the secular female artist, her musical lyrics and performance style representing the lures of the earthly world. Her songs displayed her versatile manipulation of contradictory ideological codes—ranging from patriotic songs like the famous 'Aay Watan Key Sanjeelay Jawano' (which made her beloved of the Pakistani Armed Forces during the 1965 war with India) to love songs in both Urdu and Punjabi, sung in her inimitably flirtatious way and utilizing sexy lyrics considered by many listeners to be racy beyond the acceptable limits of Pakistani/Muslim cultural propriety, especially when they dealt openly with female sexual desire ('Munda Patwari Da', 'Sonay dee Taveetri' and 'Lag Ja Gal Nal Tha Kar Key', etc., which translate respectively as: 'That Patwari Boy (is looking at me)', 'Locket of Gold' and 'Come Enter My Heart with a Bang'). Madame (as she was known by her fans, numbering in the millions across not just South Asia but in its global diaspora) symbolized the world of the profane delights, exemplified by her personal life of multiple love affairs with men of every age and type including reviled military generals (such as, most famously, President Yahya Khan under whose rule the civil war with East Pakistan broke out, resulting in the dismemberment of the country and the creation of the independent republic of Bangladesh). Amazingly, she not only withstood all manner of scandals that we would not ordinarily think Muslim societies would condone (particularly in reference to a woman), but became ever more desirable and beloved across the length and breadth of Pakistan with each succeeding love affair and broken marriage, due to the amazing music she kept producing and also, perhaps, because of, rather than in spite of, her very unconventional lifestyle. Jehan's ability to withstand scandal and retain her vast popularity is a direct result of her public career. Jill Bennett explains that art contains

a communicable language of sensation and affect with which to register something of the experience of traumatic memory – and thus, in a manner of formal innovation [...] that reflected process – a coming into language – [...] we hoped to move away from evaluating art in terms of its capacity to reflect predefined conditions and symptomologies, and to open up the question of what art itself might tell us about the lived experience. (2005: 2)

Viewing art in terms of its ability to redefine and convey new truths about lived experience is crucial for this project by allowing us to consider the ways in which art – and its affect – actually creates the social and economic dynamics that in turn allow for a Melody Queen to emerge, succeed and activate *queer desire* in her adoring public.

A few facts from Noor Jehan's life, her music and her lifestyle may surprise those in the West and within Pakistani and Muslim societies who have come to believe in an inherent dogmatic piety and love of it as a defining characteristic of Muslim cultures and peoples (this is part of her 'queer affect'). First, Noor Jehan was a *Kanjar*, which in the culture at large definitely carries a pejorative connotation, since the term is typically associated with a low-caste and low-class stratum of society linked to prostitution – but the term also has wider connotations encompassing a variety of practices and lifestyles outside the pale of 'normal' society. The typical understanding of *Kanjar* is families who live in diamond districts or red light areas in the subcontinent. These are families whose girls dance and sing and are prostitutes given to the highest bidders for short- or long-term sexual relationships. Some of these girls are abductees (*nautchis*) but the majority are born to women in the profession. Noor Jehan was not from a typical *Kanjar* family, however. Hers was a family we call *Mirasis*, who aspired to be *Kanjars*. These are small-town singing families – in her case hailing from the small town of Kasur, incidentally also the birthplace of the great seventeenth-century Sufi saint and poet Bulleh Shah, whose verses have been sung and popularized by many female singers from Pakistan, including Noor Jehan herself in the Lollywood (the lesser-known Pakistani equivalent of Bollywood) film *Tere Ishq Nachaya*. The title of the film is taken from a famous poem by Bulleh Shah, and in the film, made in 1969, Noor Jehan provides the playback lyrics to dancer Aaliya's rendition of Bulleh Shah's poem, the dancer/actress (and the voice of the playback singer) bringing together earthly sensuousness with an unearthly fearlessness symbolized by the snake wrapped around the dancer's neck. This is the first (and last) time an actress has performed live with a cobra for a film! I mention this as an example to illustrate the (queer) weddedness of the sensual and the spiritual, the secular and the sacred in Pakistani Muslim traditions of music, poetry and performance. As Bennett remarks, 'the affective responses engendered by artworks are not born of emotional identification or sympathy; rather they emerge from a direct engagement with sensation as it is registered in the work'. Thus, while people may not openly discuss the *Kanjar* lifestyle or know what it is like to touch a cobra, they can partake in the sensations, take pleasure in them, or even find a shared communion with groups who perpetuate them (Bennett 2005: 7). Jehan's background is one most Pakistanis cannot 'relate' to, but it is certainly one that interested them all, and thus changed at least some people's attitudes towards *Kanjars*, once they were able to enter and engage in the 'queer' realm of friendship her life story offered.

When a *Kanjar* family feels confident enough that it can survive in a large town, its members move to the bigger cities and migrate to *hira mandis*/diamond districts there. Indeed, after Noor Jehan's parents moved the family from the small town of Kasur to the city of Calcutta, the film capital of India in the late 1930s, and where Noor Jehan and her two sisters achieved a certain success onstage and in film – Noor Jehan and one of her sisters migrated to the Punjabi cultural capital, Lahore, and moved into a house in the famous Hira Mandi of there – from where she began issuing her own letterhead with that address on it (a copy of the same is still in the possession of cultural critic Dr Adil Omar of Lahore), letting people know she had 'arrived' on the scene.

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In a well-respected book of cultural history of the region written in Urdu, the author Nazir Chaudhury goes on to describe the various areas where *Kanjars* have historically lived in Lahore, these being Landa Bazaar (near the railway station), Dhobi Mandi, Chauk Chakla and Chowk Surgeon Singh (Moti Bazaar). The most historically recent of such neighbourhoods is Shahi Muhalla, also known as Hira Mandi. Four main streets or areas of Shahi Mandi are Chetraam Road, Bazaar Sheikhpurian, Tibi Galli and Guzar Shahbaz Khan. No one lives in this area permanently anymore but *Kanjars* have their 'offices' there, which is where nightly song and dance performances have historically taken place. These areas are described as *Dar-us-Zina* (where *zina* – adultery and fornication – take place) by Maulvi Ahmed Chishti in his colourful publication on traditions of music, singing girls, and social and cultural conditions written about the pre-Partition India of 1821–1861 (1975). He describes them in detail but then backs off saying he does not want to go any further because the picture he paints is so shameful. As far as Noor Jehan is concerned, it is in Shahi Muhallah that she arrived and rented her first house in Lahore after Calcutta. She would have thus been identified immediately as coming from the lower-class *Kanjar* background.

Chaudhury explains in his book that when a *Kanjini* (a female *Kanjar*) marries, she never looks back at her former life, becomes she is very religious and one can never expect her to betray her husband. These are the rules and behaviours associated with *Kanjar* lifestyles and values, and therefore, generally speaking *Kanjar* families never want their girls to marry – when a girl is born, *Kanjars* celebrate because they know a money-making machine has arrived. Not so with the birth of boys – and in this important respect, *Kanjar* culture, extant in both Muslim and Hindu society, is the obverse of the patriarchal mindset of the larger culture of which it is a part, but obviously one that the dominant culture prefers to keep hidden even as its elite members patronize and enjoy the pleasures afforded them by *Kanjars*. It is no surprise then to learn that when Noor Jehan decided to marry S. H. Rizvi, a well-known film director of her youth, her brothers and family tried to stop her and the matter was even taken to court. Caving in to their pressure, Rizvi gave an undertaking to her family that he would never approach her again. He then left for Bombay. However, some years later Noor Jehan also moved to Bombay and happened to end up working for the same film company that employed him, and that is how they met up again, a meeting that led to marriage, which itself ended in a scandalous and publicly titillating divorce for Madame Noor Jehan, which far from leading to a fall from grace (as happens with politicians and many media stars today in the West) only increased her popularity in Muslim Pakistan (Munir 1984).

In an unauthorized, highly salacious but popular biography of Madame Noor Jehan written by her first husband, film director Shaukat Hussain Rizvi, to whom she was publicly unfaithful, several issues germane to the discussion of women, gender, sexuality and religion in contemporary Pakistan can be traced.⁴ First, it is clear that women were – and continue to be – seen as the property of their husbands, and need to be 'controlled'. Madame was no exception, and Rizvi begins his narrative stating that he tried to 'control' her lascivious behaviour by a variety of means, including moving her to a place where he could 'keep an eye on her'. Women, in this Muslim male imaginary, are temptresses and devious sexual beings who are ready to lie and cheat their way into as many different men's beds as possible, thinking nothing of cuckolding their legally wedded husbands. They are also seen as insanely jealous

of other women, and believe their loyal husbands are having affairs with every woman they speak to or see in the course of their daily activities.

It is no stretch to suggest that Rizvi's view of Noor Jehan as a promiscuous, oversexed *Kanjar* prostitute was, and remains, the prevailing view of women in almost all cultures, and certainly so in the patriarchal culture of Pakistan where the religious ideology of Islam as understood and practiced by the Muslim male elite simply confirms this misogynistic view. As Maulana Waris Mazhari of India writes:

The traditional *ulema* [Islamic scholars] [...] insist that women must be controlled as much as possible in order to protect Muslim society from immorality and sexual licentiousness, and that they must remain confined to their homes. They believe that women must play no social roles outside the domestic sphere whatsoever. If women are permitted to do so, they argue, it would open to floodgates of chaos and lead to a breakdown of society.

(Mazhari 2010)

Fatima Mernissi of Morocco confirms this misogynistic viewpoint as a political development within the history of early Islam when she explains,

All the monotheistic religions are shot through by the conflict between the divine and the feminine, but none more so than Islam, which has opted for the occultation of the feminine, at least symbolically, by trying to veil it, to hide it, to mask it. Islam as sexual practice unfolds with a very special theatricality since its acted out in a scene where the *hijab* (veil) occupies a central position.

(Mernissi 1987)

What is fascinating to me is how the phenomenon known as Malika Tarranum (Melody Queen), Madame Noor Jehan, rose from the ranks of a literal *Kanjar* to become a Queen, not transforming the image of the *Kanjar* into one of purity or piety, but rather infusing it with the pleasures of the sensual voice and body and rendering that sensual, sexual energy not just acceptable, but adored and desirable across class, ethnicity, gender and religious affiliation. While it is tempting to see her as an iconic figure who was anomalous in the larger culture to which she belonged, I suggest that Pakistani Muslim culture and society has, within its syncretic tradition of pan-Indian Sufism, an appeal to the spiritual that is paradoxically also deeply wedded to the sensual. It is this heritage of Sufi Islam that singers like Madame Noor Jehan invoked affectively in their audiences, even as she did not embrace Sufism's more esoteric or ritual aspects or even refer to herself as a Sufi devotee with a *murshid* (spiritual leader). While it may be true that the more recent 'Sufi music vogue is a shallow urban bourgeois fad whose performers lack any serious or longstanding engagement with or understanding of genuine Sufi tradition' (Manuel 2008: 380), it seems to me that singers like Noor Jehan got away with much that was bawdy and irreverent in their song choices and personal style of performance and living, because at some level audiences understood instinctively the marriage of secular and sacred in her work, which underlies much of the creative spirit of the country and its peoples, and which bespoke a tolerance and pluralism that existed and was accepted in the culture of Pakistan in the early decades of its nationhood.

For example, a 1970 film made in Lollywood features a song by playback singer Noor Jehan, showing the popular actress of that era, the voluptuous Firdaus, lip-syncing and dancing to Noor Jehan's famous song 'Sun Wanjhali Di Meethri Taan'/'Listen to my beautiful flute', as her earthly lover/beloved Ranjha plays in the foreground on his flute, his long hair and get-up the mark of a Sufi dervish (saint.) Viewing these opening shots, audiences are pulled in through the contrasting (but equally beautiful) style and substance of the song: the lyrics and the figure of Ranjha represent the sacred, whilst the actress's wooing of her earthly beloved Ranjha through song represents the secular, more profane aspects of love. Yet, the song in totality mixes up these two impulses of human nature, raising questions regarding the place of music and female performance in Pakistani society, not just in Madame Noor Jehan's more progressive era of the 1950s–2000, but in today's Pakistan where Islamist clergy and extremists in the country are issuing *fatwas* banning music in general and targeting female singers and performers for specific disapproval and even for public executions.⁵ How, audiences must surely ask themselves after seeing this picturized song sung by Noor Jehan, can music be banned by Islamist clergy and extremists in the country when even secular renditions (like those of the film) are steeped in the power and attraction of the devotional impulse? If human love is a reflection of the divine, how can love songs be the mark of the devil? How can women as both objects of desire and desiring subjects be sinful creatures? Barbara Ehrenreich attempts to answer such questions by explaining how, when

The phenomenon of collective ecstasy entered the colonialist European mind, it was stained with feelings of hostility, contempt, and fear ... the essence of the Western mind, and particularly the Western male, upper-class mind, [as well as, later, the imitative collective mind of the postcolonial patriarchal society of Pakistan] was 'its ability to resist the contagious rhythm of the drums,' and thus had no way of describing and understanding the love' that may exist among dozens of people at a time; and it is this kind of love that is expressed in ecstatic ritual.

(2007: 7–14)

Clearly, singers like Noor Jehan require of us to learn more about the role of music and of female singers in the culture of Pakistan in particular, and Islam in general, by engulfing us in the many different languages of ecstatic love that hold out the promise of Aristotelian friendship, where, by embracing the terrain of affect through the ecstasy of song proffered to us by singers like Noor Jehan, we might be able to think and act politics differently, queerly, progressively.

ABIDA PARVEEN, THE QUEERING OF MUSICAL SPACE, AND QUEER LINKAGES TO A FEMINIST NOVEL OF THE AMERICAN SOUTH

Singers like Noor Jehan, Abida Parveen and Deeyah, by inhabiting, even embracing, the uncomfortable space of affect aliens in their societies, produce a Sufi-inspired 'queering' of an Islamic heteronormative world-view that 'normally' tries to compartmentalize not only nature and culture, body and mind, but also soul, or the divine from the merely human. These singers, going against the normative grain as it were, bring the divine or the sacred back into conversation with the secular through their love songs – a conversation with long historical roots in Islamic history but one that has been conveniently

ignored by orthodox clerics of the present time in a denial of that history where Islam has grown 'sideways'. It is a history that Ayesha Jalal reminds us of in her book *Partisans of Allah* (2008), when she critiques the tendency of 'mullahs' or ignorant, linear and literal-minded orthodox Islamic clerics, to draw their lineage from the likes of firebrand leaders of the subcontinent like Sirhindi, in order to preach 'waging war against infidels'. Instead, Jalal argues, these clerics should embrace the greater *jihad* (*jihad-al-akbar*), which is the struggle to overcome one's own 'lower self' – a concept beloved of the followers of Ibn-al-Arabi, a fourteenth-century Sufi/mystic. Jalal writes,

Not only does blanket condemnation of Ibn al-Arabi's followers as pantheistic, denigrate their liberal stance on social and cultural accommodations, but it is symptomatic of the failure to come to grips with the mystical orientation. In declaring that all is God, the *wujudis* [followers of Arabi] never implied that God is in the material world, as their [orthodox Islamist] detractors maintained, but only that the world itself is inexplicably immersed in God.

(Jalal 2008: 39)

Surely such a 'queer' reading of Islam by Jalal is akin to the 'we of me' philosophy painfully embraced by Frankie Addams, the model of female masculinity who is the adolescent protagonist of Carson McCullers' 1940 novel of the American south, *The Member of the Wedding*. Here is a novel, written by a woman, critiquing the western secular model of the American nation, which also creates so many 'affect aliens' out of its putative citizens. Without knowing it – as surely neither did her author/creator McCullers – Frankie is the embodiment of the spiritual quest of the Sufis, her need similar to their need/desire to merge the 'self' with the 'other' outside it, and in so doing, experience the Oneness of divinity through love (the 'we of me'). In her awkward confusion over her own morphing teenage body and its roiling emotions, Frankie seeks to morph into the more 'feminine' F. Jasmine Addams, but her true desire is to merge this female self of her future embodiment with her more masculine tomboy one of the present and past, and her object of desire is not *one* 'other' with whom she should marry and settle down according to the dominant hetero-normative paradigm, but to be one of a threesome, that is, she wishes to become a member of the wedding of her brother and his fiancée with both of whom she is in love. And on the eve of this wedding, as her masculine and feminine selves seek to join to each other and to the world outside, the joy she experiences in this feeling of connectedness comes to her through a memory of music she has heard earlier during the day:

A second fact about that day was the forgotten music that sprang suddenly into her mind – snatches of orchestra minuets, march tunes and waltzes, and the jazz horn of Honey Brown A last difference about that morning was the way her world seemed layered in three different parts, all the twelve years of the old Frankie, the present day itself, and the future ahead when the three of them would be together in all the many distant places... so these were the main reasons why F. Jasmine felt, in an unworded way, that this was a morning different from all mornings she had ever known. And of all these facts and feelings, the strongest of all was *the need to be known for her true self and recognized*.

(McCullers 1946: 57, emphasis added)

In this need to be 'known for her true self', she is joined by her six-year-old male cousin, John Henry. But while Frankie's need is still an individual one, John Henry's vision embraces all of humanity, for when the family cook, Berenice, argues that the 'law of human sex was exactly right just as it was', John Henry argues contrarily that 'people ought to be half boy and half girl'. In one of their afternoon games in the kitchen, 'when Frankie and John Henry would sit at the dinner table critiquing "the work of God," imagining ways to improve the world, John Henry, with a voice "happy and high and strange" would sing about the world he imagined'. The future John Henry wishes for himself and others is specifically freakish, but not in a frightening way at all. His world is 'a mixture of the delicious and the freak' (McCullers 1946: 96).

It is also scatological in a childish way – chocolate dirt, lemonade, a hinged tail – that enfolds subject and object. This world is, as Mieke Bal would say, 'ontologically corporeal ... bodies of thought' and involves 'an epistemology of what that could mean – the presence of the human body' (2006: 333). The ways in which John Henry imagines the world reveal a rejection of the classic body and a privileging of messiness and chaos. Unlike 'the work of God' that operates at the advantage of normative subjects, John Henry's world is egalitarian and accommodates a range of bodies and desires. It is a body of thought as it thinks through the presence of the freakish body and thinks about the utopian ramifications of a symbiotic relationship between the world and the body (Sharp 2010: 22). This presence of the 'freakish body' and thinking through it to arrive at a 'utopian ... symbiotic relationship between the world and the body' beyond the confines of rigidly defined gender hierarchies is very much an aspect worth examining more closely as relating to the question of gender in Sufi ritual practices, including the singing of qawwalis and other devotional music. Reflecting upon male singers' adoption of female voices, through the practice of falsetto, as well as women Sufi singers' responses to issues of gendered identity within this tradition of male-dominated qawwali music, Abida Parveen, the leading contemporary female voice of Pakistan representing Sufi music today, says (echoing John Henry), 'Male and female does not even come into it – what you call Allah is one – God is the *mehver*! centre of everything – you make a roundabout and whatever way it goes – it is in that direction – it is as if you have put up a clock tower, and every passage will go through it – it will go to it – it really does not matter whether it is male or female – in fact we can really say in the Sufi's terminology – if someone is not a male – he is called a female' (Abbas 2002: 22).

Indeed, it can be argued that in the figure of Abida Parveen, we have a recognition of the 'true self' Frankie Addams hungered for in a different time and place, an embodiment of the merging of the 'half boy half girl' that is John Henry's ideal for humanity in a world that 'enfolds subject and object' and, as such, is both corporeal and transcendent, a world in which we are all participants at once in the secular life and the sacred realm. Thus, to experience Abida Parveen singing *sufiana kalam* (similar in intent but performatively different from the qawwali style) – with her large, 'freakish' body that does not bespeak traditional gender markers of femininity since she usually wears shapeless tunics, no make-up and her hair in an unruly mop of curls adorning her plain face that could be male or female – to grasp the hand of friendship her music and persona proffers to us, is indeed to enter a space of blurred gender identification. Her appearance onstage, with her wild curly hair framing her face as she sways to the music she sings, the audience clapping

and swaying along with her, introduces audiences right away to the beauty and power of devotional music from Pakistan, which celebrates the quest for divine love, but through earthly metaphors of desire, in which male singers perform in a female voice while female singers like Abida Parveen take on traditional male forms and feminize them. As Naseer Mirza and Sikander Baloch of Radio Pakistan observed in an interview conducted by Shemeem Abbas in 1999:

Since she was trained within the male traditions her style is exceptional. She uses the *dohra* or *bait*, short two-line verses, within the main body of her narrative, a style she imbibed from her male mentors, including her late husband, Shaikh Ghulam Hussain. ... No other woman in Sind has this style, which is essentially a unique male style.

(Abbas 2002: 24)

One of her more popular concert compositions, which is a mystic text about a female mendicant and which Abida Parveen performs at both concerts and at the annual Urs celebrations commemorating the Sufi poet Abdul Shah Latif's death anniversary at his shrine in Sindh (she is one of the rare females invited to perform in this space, and I suppose it helps that she is a Sindhi herself), is filled with allusions to the Leila-Majnun myth in which Majnun, the male lover, has become a madman for love of his beloved Layla (Abbas 2002). In the lyrics she sings (written by Hakeem Nasser in either the eighteenth or nineteenth century), Parveen sings as the embodiment of *both* the madman (male) and the female mendicant who is fearful that the one she loves is perhaps the *majnun* or the madman who has set himself on fire. But here, in this verse, the female mendicant and the madman are interchangeable as both the desiring subject and object of desire, male and female.

<i>Jis karan mai jogi bane</i>	(for whom I became the female mendicant
<i>Kahin vohi na jalta ho-e</i>	has he ignited himself
[...] <i>jab se tune mujhe</i>	Since thou made me
<i>Divana bana rakha hai</i>	A mad one
<i>Sang har sakhs ne</i>	A stone every person
<i>Hatho me utha rakha hai</i>	Carries in their hand) ⁶

Therefore, in both her personal appearance and her style of singing, as well as in her choice of material, Parveen embodies the blurring of gender and class hierarchies that equally blurs walls separating earthly love from divine love, the secular from the realm of the sacred, and the Muslim East from the Secular West.

DEEYAH: WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE A MUSLIM MADONNA?

At least two generations younger than Madame Noor Jehan, born in Pakistan and raised in Norway, Deeyah, aka the Muslim Madonna, trained in the Indo-Pakistani classical tradition by *Ustaad* Sultan Khan (Madame received her early training in classical music as well before becoming a playback singer of film music). She is hardly of the same musical stature as the Melody Queen or Abida Parveen, though she is perhaps the most popular female Muslim artist on Myspace today with over 100,000 registered friends. Her case is

6. I have taken the transcription and translation of this verse from Shemeem Abbas' book, *The Female Voice in Sufi Ritual* (2002). Whereas she sees the speaker of the poem as the female mendicant, I see the poet blurring the speaking voice into avatars of both the female mendicant and her beloved madman, the Majnun figure.

instructive for some parallel light that it sheds on notions of female honour and performance protocols within Muslim culture today. What is most startling to observe through this comparison between her and the former two singers is the degree of regression that has occurred in recent times, back to patriarchal concepts such as the need to control female sexual energy as exhibited through musical performance. Such concepts were challenged and overcome rather easily by Madame Noor Jehan in her native Pakistan. Indeed, as noted earlier, her popularity in no way suffered as a result of either her provocative choice of songs and singing style or her unconventional private behaviour, which, while scandalous, nevertheless titillated her adoring audiences at home and abroad. Contrarily, the 30-something Deeyah has had to flee the supposedly liberal, democratic western country of Norway because of threats against her from the Norwegian-Muslim community there. This of course raises questions about the relationship between entrenched racism within European countries like Norway and the liberal politics of a multiculturalist ideology that has failed to bring Muslim Norwegians into the fold of the country's liberal ethos. Because of threats against her life, Deeyah has all but given up her own singing and performance career, focusing more recently on a project called Sisterhood. Established in 2007, Deeyah's Sisterhood provides an outlet of artistic expression for young aspiring Muslim female artists across creative disciplines. Along with Freemuse (The World Forum on Music and Censorship: <http://freemuse.org/>), she is the co-creator and co-producer of an international compilation album, *Listen To The Banned*, which features banned and censored music artists from the Middle East, Africa and Asia. Released in 2010, the album and the larger project aim to bring musicians whose work is censored in one way or another in their native countries or in their communities to the larger world via recordings and possibly a world concert in the future, with a special focus on Muslim women singers. The album peaked at number 6 on the World Music Charts in Europe and spent months on these charts the year of its release (Anon. 2013: n.p.).

Encouraged to sing from a young age with her music aficionado father's encouragement (he is an immigrant to Norway from Punjab, Pakistan, while her mother is a Pashtun), Deeyah, whose birth name is Deepika, has trained with some well-known teachers and performers of North Indo-Pakistani classical music such as Ustaads Sultan Khan and Bade Fateh Ali Khan, who taught her the intricacies of the *khyal*, *thumri* and *ghazal* styles of music of the Patiala *gharana* (school) when they visited Norway at the invitation of her father and the music society he founded in Oslo. Her music career, though relatively short to date, especially as she is no longer singing/performing, is instructive in highlighting the imbrications of gender issues, sexuality and religion as these are being reformulated globally to narrow the public space allowed for female singers/performers of Muslim background to express their art without fear of bodily harm from extremists, whose views have become more mainstream in recent decades within what used to be a generally moderate Muslim populace.

While the Pakistani society of Madame Noor Jehan's era had ample room and space for the meteoric rise of a boundary-breaking singer like her, whose popularity and success turned even the sacred/Sufi poems she sang into sexy, earthy numbers, and whose popularity lasted until her death during the sixth decade of Pakistan's existence, the Pakistani culture of the nation's first four decades also embraced Sufi-type singers of the kind represented by Abida

Parveen. While sacred musical space was and remains a male-dominated one, Abida's entry into it led to her prominence and sustained popularity, challenging conventional pieties and boundaries within sacred space.

This brings us back to the case of Deeyah. She has released only two albums to date, the first, *Deepika*, released in 1995, and the second, *Ataraxis*, in 2007, and a few hit singles. The songs she has performed straddle the sacred/profane line in interesting ways, with the young woman baring more of her body in music videos accompanying the release of her songs and albums than her female Pakistani predecessors under discussion. However, the baring of her back in her hit single 'History' (released in 1996) and baring it again and finally taking off an Afghan style burqa to slip into a pool in a bikini-clad body in her hit single 'What Will It Be' (featuring guest performance rap by LA rapper and Grand Theft Auto San Andreas voice talent Young Maylay, released in 2006) are political choices necessitated by the charged Islamist climate of not just her birth country but the racist European culture in which she has grown up (Anon. 2013: n.p.). Thus, for instance, in the music video for her song 'History', we see Deeyah as the only young dark-skinned woman on a bus filled with white people ranging in age from the young to the very old, many of them looking like skinheads with tattoos on their arms and shaved heads, eyeing her as an outsider. The scene also shows a man who looks like a cop, following her with a sniffer dog. Following this shot, we see Deeyah with the camera behind her, her back now bared, singing the lyrics, 'I won't fight, but I'll defend my right' and 'History is proving us all wrong ... no reason to be proud of our own'. She then goes on to assert, 'I won't step back into the shade ... I will let my roots grow deep'. Here, her naked back serves as a slate on which a new history can be written, one in which she 'belongs' to the white society in which she has grown up, in a world where no one group can claim to be in the right, but where all individuals should have the same rights without having to resort to violence to defend those rights. The lyrics are sung in a style that is signature Deeyah, rock and electronic rhythms with her vocals trilling a tribute to the Indian classical training she has received.

The mixing of the secular (to some even profane), with the sacred, that created an uproar when the video for her single 'What Will It Be' was released in 2006, led to her hiring a team of bodyguards to protect her against the death threats she began receiving even in London, where she had moved some years prior due to negative publicity against her and her family by some Muslim groups in Norway. Indeed, as she explains in an extended interview she gave to the webzine *Freemuse*, the song and music video are a response to her critics and to those who were trying to silence her with threats and intimidation. The song 'What Will It Be' was born out of her decision to speak out against those who would curb individual freedom of choice and expression, as well as to expose the hypocrisy of many within Muslim communities who are more concerned with women's skin than with their actions or with the problem of honour killings. She goes on to further underline her message in the video:

The hypocrisy of some people within the [Muslim] community is highlighted through various images and scenes in the video. One particular scene – 'the burka bikini scene' – is in the video for two reasons, one being that in its most basic and direct way it is about the choice of a woman, the second reason is to pinpoint this hypocrisy which has very much been confirmed by the reactions to the video – that a woman being

sexual and owning her own body is a way bigger crime and outrage than the murder, beatings and the mistreatment of women. The reactions of some people to this scene in particular has made it painfully clear that skin is a bigger sin than murder. This I find disgusting and indicative of the tremendously twisted mentality of some within our community.

(Anon. 2006a)

In recurring scenes throughout the music video, images of individuals, especially women, are projected onto Deeyah's bare back. Every person is someone who was murdered for his or her individual choices. Yet, the outrage expressed by many within Muslim communities was not in support of these victims of so-called honor killings, but against what became known as the infamous 'burqa to bikini' scene. For example, Hoda Fahmy, who works with a group that provides education to Muslim women in Canada, says Deeyah's message is lost due to the lack of the singer's clothing. 'A lot of us are working for women's rights, particularly in the Muslim world. I think we have more self-respect than to dance around naked to make our point', she stated. 'It's unfortunate that she has to use those means, because it's true, women are not able to speak up in a lot of these countries' (Anon. 2006 b). However, for Deeyah, her music video is about freedom of choice; to dance around scantily clad or remain within the confines of the burqa is a fundamental issue about women's right to choose, and neither choice should be deemed as a sign of lacking 'self-respect'. She explains:

I did this video because I needed to be honest and overcome my own fears about speaking out on these issues. The only thing I wanted to do was to make sure I didn't disrespect Islam as a religion. I find it interesting that many people equate the burka as being part of Islam when it is most definitely not. It is a garb developed as a result of culture not religion. People seem to think that I am 'casting off' the burka in the music video when in fact I am embracing it as a choice as well as embracing the bikini as a choice. There is no disrespect of the burka at all in the video. I believe it is a viable choice for women (but only by women, not men who might impose it) just as I think the bikini is acceptable if a woman chooses to wear it. Respecting a woman's choice is what this is about. I do not judge a woman who chooses to wear the burka and do not want to impose my way of dress or living on anyone. Similarly I expect this same respect for my choices as personally I do not choose or wish to wear the burka in my life.

(Anon. 2006a)

Additionally, in the video and in her interviews she criticizes religiousness based on words rather than actions and true spirituality. The following lyrics from 'What Will It Be' show the scope of her critique to be even broader, as she links imperialism to extremism, control of female sexuality in the name of religion to the elite classes' control of the masses. Religion is truly the opiate of the people in her musical vision:

From the land of the free to the jewel of the empire
Does the truth only come from the top of a holy man's spire?
From three paces back, covered head to toe
Are the rules just for the masses and written just for show.
(Muslimah Media Watch 2008)

In several interviews, Deeyah has cited Abida Parveen as being amongst her musical influences, though not Noor Jehan, who might seem more appropriate as the 'secular' musician who flaunted her sexuality as does Deeyah. However, it is the connection to Sufism that Deeyah claims and which can be heard in the lyrics of several of her songs that connects her more obviously to Abida Parveen. For example, 'Jogi', which is a song from her album *Ataraxis* (the title of the album means 'Serenity', a state Sufi poets and saints aim for in their spiritual practice), borrows its refrain from the Sufi poet Bulleh Shah's famous poem 'Ranjha Ranjha kardi nee, mein aap Ranjha hoeey', in which the lover loses herself/her own identity in the identity of her beloved. The same song in the original Punjabi has been sung by Abida Parveen, and Madame Noor Jehan has also sung other songs from Bulleh Shah's repertoire of Sufi poetry.

What is more pertinent to note here, however, is that body and soul or spirit are not seen as separate entities within Sufi thought, and indeed, music is seen as the experience that welds the realms of the sacred and the secular, the divine and the earthly, the body and the mind, into one unified whole. Deeyah's song 'Oneness' (also from her album *Ataraxis*) enacts this wholeness with the different kinds of musical styles coming together, from her own Urdu lyrics sung in an Indian semi-classical style, to rock, electronic and house beats, sitar strings in the background and a male voice speaking *tabla bols* in a tarana-style. Furthermore, the male voice performs some background voice-overs repeating a phrase in Urdu translated as 'songs and music make everything okay', which serves as a healing incantation.

Deeyah acknowledges the deep and lasting influence of her early training in North Indian classical music on her practice as a singer, as well as the influence of the Sufi music tradition of qawwali and the mystic poetry of Bulleh Shah and Amir Khusro. She explains how her two great teachers, Ustaads Fateh Ali Khan and Sultan Khan, 'taught with a great emphasis on the fact that music is devotion to Allah and music being one of the purest forms of connection not only as an art form but also a source of spirituality' (Anon. 2006a). Understood through her own words, it is easy to see how her trajectory as a musical artist, while unique in its contemporary diasporic manifestation, is not all that different from that of the other two female singers of Pakistan I have discussed in this article, in terms of combining the secular and sacred poles of Muslim life, in which female sexuality becomes yet another manifestation of the Divine spirit, her voice the connector of love for man, woman and Allah. In baring her body, Deeyah also bares her soul and shows the two as inextricably linked. Bennett explains that when considering affective responses to art, one cannot 'entail construing the affective response in narrow cause-and-effect terms, as if the image functioned simply as a mechanistic trigger or stimulus', but must rather view art as a 'jolt that does not so much reveal truth as thrust us involuntarily into a mode of critical inquiry' (2005: 11). This is precisely the critical thought process that Deeyah hopes her performances will provoke, rather than reifying a simplistic view of the (Muslim) female figure. The images of Deeyah in her music videos, then, effect a 'queering' of traditional female space within the Muslim imaginary, by 'jolting us ... into a mode of critical inquiry' that leads to an affective response in the audience.

Deeyah's images of her bare back inscribed with names of female victims of honour killing, or her culturally erased back in her video 'History', therefore blur the folds between 'burqa' and 'bikini', tracing the contours of her-stories on the body of the Muslim woman rewriting his-tory. Kellie Sharp describes

the 1936 novel *Nightwood* (by Djuna Barnes) as 'the body written', in which 'we find the mind and body "harnessed" together in order to grasp what it is to be a queer subject and to love' (Sharp 2010). I would extend the metaphor to argue that in the musical *oeuvre* of the three Pakistani female singers I have discussed here, the subject being 'queered' is Islam as understood by the orthodox elite and their followers, and it is the queering of it that allows us to enter the realm of love and friendship that the Sufi poets of Islam extol, and which breaks down the presumptive divisions between body and soul, nature and culture, male and female.

The music created by Pakistani female singers like Madame Noor Jehan, Abida Parveen and Deeyah, aka the Muslim Madonna is thus the embodiment of a divine and holistic love, which has the power to sever the psychically damaging knot connecting the Muslim Male Imaginary to the realm of the Real (the world of culture), a connection that leads to the Laws of the Symbolic that have created within the Muslim world such horrors as honour killings in the name of the Father (a Father who rules, in the language of God, the world of the Symbolic). By severing this knot between Lacan's formulated realms of the Real, the (Male) Imaginary and the Symbolic, the parallel divisive distinction between the female world represented by (a fallen) 'nature' and the male world of (religiously sanctioned) 'culture' would also obviously collapse. Such an 'undoing' of the Lacanian knot in male-dominated western psychoanalytic theory would lead, according to Sharp, to a 'blurring' or 'folding' of the contours between the binary opposites of Male and Female worlds, and a return to a healthier and more holistic vision of our queer, shared world. If a parallel affect of the Pakistani Muslim female singers' embodied musical *oeuvre* is to undo, and by undoing, blur the borders separating the 'secular' from the 'sacred', 'man' from 'woman', 'righteousness' from 'impiety,' which are embedded in both Lacan's and (straight or normative) Islam's divisive vision of Nature versus Culture, then indeed, the work of these female singers is blessed and utterly necessary for the world, East and West, to reinvent itself.

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