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Filming the Motherland: Gendered Violence and Female Empowerment in *Dukhtar* and *My Pure Land*

Zainabb Hull

Since the post-9/11 'War on Terror', public perceptions of Pakistan in the west have centred on an image of an oppressive state characterised by Islamic extremism and gendered violence.[1] Following its revival in the mid-2000s, Pakistani cinema has tackled these social issues with several box office successes that explore terrorism, national identity, and domestic abuse, including Shoaib Mansoor's *Khude Kay Liye* (2007) and Mehreen Jabbar's *Ramchand Pakistani* (2008).[2] In 2011, Mansoor's critical and commercial hit *Bol* (2011) examined the subjugation of women and intersex people, paving the way for further contemporary social dramas to explore themes around gendered violence. According to Filomena M. Critelli, an estimated 80% of Pakistani women experience domestic violence.[3] Activists, community leaders, and cultural creators, including filmmakers, artists, and musicians, from Pakistan or of Pakistani heritage continue to work to address gendered violence both in multigenerational diasporic communities, including the UK and the US, and at home in Pakistan.[4] Activists and creators must navigate complicated relationships with 'home', the diaspora, and the west in order to fight for equality. Whilst both the UK and the US Orientalise and demonise Pakistani communities, Pakistani cultural identity is more defined in the British diaspora, with larger, tighter-knit communities than in the US, following mass migration after Pakistan's partition from British India in 1947.[5] The diasporic filmmakers Afia Nathaniel and Sarmad Masud address gendered violence alongside national and cultural Pakistani identity in their respective films, *Dukhtar* (2014) and *My Pure Land* (2017). These films explore the filmmakers' complex relationships with Pakistan by highlighting the links between Pakistan's patriarchal cultural identity and gendered violence through the use of colour, imagery, and their representation of both women and men. *Dukhtar* and *My Pure Land* reject simplistic western perceptions of Pakistan whilst demanding accountability for gendered violence, suggesting pathways to female empowerment and gender equality through women's economic and social independence, and a reshaping of popular concepts of 'honour' and value that define a woman's worth only in relation to men.

Sandyha Shukla notes that South Asian women activists fighting against gendered violence in diasporic communities acknowledge that the prevalence of this violence is impacted by patriarchal South Asian cultural norms alongside racist marginalisation experienced by South Asian women in the diaspora.[6] Meanwhile, Aisha Gill and Avtar Brah argue that gendered violence within South Asian communities, including 'honour'-based violence, is intertwined with both patriarchal power hierarchies and the western

[1] Nadir Cheema, 'Pakistan's Global Image: Perception and Causes', *Asian Affairs Journal Weblog*, 16 November 2016 <http://rsaa.org.uk/blog/2016/11/16/pakistans-global-image-perception-causes/> [accessed 26 March 2019].

[2] Ali Nobil Ahmad, 'Explorations into Pakistani Cinema: Introduction', *Screen*, 57.4 (2016), 468–471 (pp. 468–469) <https://doi.org/10.1093/screen/hjw053>.

[3] Filomena M. Critelli, 'Beyond the Veil in Pakistan', *Affilia: Journal of Women and Social Work*, 25.3 (2010), 236–249 (p. 241) <https://doi.org/10.1177/0886109910375204>.

[4] Rahat Imran, *Activist Documentary Film in Pakistan* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016), pp. 138–167.

[5] Yunas Samad, 'The Pakistani Diaspora: USA and UK', in *The Routledge Handbook of the South Asian Diaspora*, ed. Joya Chatterji and David Washbrook (London: Routledge, 2013), 295–305 (pp. 295–298).

[6] Sandyha Shukla, 'Feminisms of the Diaspora Both Local and Global: The Politics of South Asian Women Against Domestic Violence', in *Women Transforming Politics: An Alternative Reader*, ed. by Cathy Cohen, Kathy Jones and Joan C. Tronto (New York, NY: NYU Press, 1997), 269–283 (pp. 270–271).

construction of South Asia as 'other' and 'backward'.[7] For feminist activists both at home and within the diaspora, challenging violence against Pakistani women and fighting for gender equality is complicated by this double act of South Asia's patriarchal and the West's imperialist (paternalistic) oppression. Women and activists within the Pakistani diaspora must work to de-centre western secular feminism in order to promote transnational feminism(s) that can account for the lived experiences and cultural identity of Pakistani women both at home and in the diaspora.[8]

Cultural identity for Pakistanis within the diaspora is linked to national identity, constructing an image of a 'homeland' that is both central to diasporic Pakistani identity and lived experiences, including marginalisation within western, racist, and imperialist societies, and a nation that is hostile to women, particularly those with lower class and socioeconomic statuses. For diasporic filmmakers, cinema offers a platform from which to explore the complexities of identity and national or cultural pride, anti-imperialist and anti-colonial responses to western hegemony, as well as oppression and gendered violence within Pakistani communities. Pakistani nationalism must be unsettled in order to enable positive social change; celebration of Pakistani culture can only come through a reckoning of Pakistani politics and history. At the same time, the West must be de-centred by rejecting imperialist binaries that establish the east as dangerous and uncivilised and the West as safe and inclusive, when diasporic Pakistani women face discrimination and violence in western communities too. Masud's *My Pure Land* is the filmmaker's first feature film, following on from several critically acclaimed comedy shorts exploring themes of British Asian identity, community, and the western exoticisation and appropriation of South Asian culture. Similarly, *Dukhtar* is Nathaniel's debut feature, with the filmmaker's previous work exploring female equality and independence in Pakistan, as well as Pakistani cultural heritage. Each filmmaker lives and works in the diaspora, with Nathaniel born in Quetta, Pakistan and based in the US, and Masud born in Bradford, England to Pakistani immigrant parents, and both creators use their work to navigate their relationship to home and a global Pakistani community.

Dukhtar is inspired by the true story of a mother, Allah Rakhi (Samiya Mumtaz), and her ten year-old daughter Zainab (Saleha Aref) as they flee their rural mountain village to try to prevent the girl's marriage to a tribal warlord. Along the way, they encounter truck driver Sohail (Mohib Mirza), who hesitantly aids their escape and later becomes a protective male figure for Allah Rakhi and Zainab. The film depicts the possibility of female empowerment through breaking away from oppressive patriarchal traditions such as child marriage, and in the potential of female relationships, such as the relationships between Allah Rakhi and Zainab, and Allah Rakhi and her estranged mother, to provide solidarity and emotional and physical support away from men. *Dukhtar* was filmed and produced in Pakistan but received much of its funding from Europe in the face of reluctance from the re-emerging Pakistani film industry.[9] *My Pure Land*, too, was shot on location in Pakistan, whilst its UK-based funding and production reflects Masud's British-Pakistani background. Also based on a true story, *My Pure Land* follows Nazo Dharejo (Suhaee Abro) as she defends her family home from her uncle Mehrban (Ashen Murad), who seeks to lay claim to her family home following the death of her grandfather. The film follows Nazo, her sister Saeda (Eman Malik), and her mother Waderi (Razia Malik), as they fight to protect their home and each other during the siege by Mehrban and his men. The action of the siege is broken up by flashback scenes that

[7] Aisha K. Gill and Avtar Brah, 'Interrogating Cultural Narratives About "Honour"-Based Violence', *European Journal of Women's Studies*, 21.1 (2014), 72–86 (pp. 74–75) <https://doi.org/10.1177/1350506813510424>.

[8] Amina Jamal, 'Transnational Feminism as Critical Practice: A Reading of Feminist Discourses in Pakistan', *Meridians: Feminism, Race, Transnationalism*, 5.2 (2005), 57–82 (p.75) <https://doi.org/10.1353/mer.2005.0008>.

[9] '*Dukhtar*, *Mary Kom* Emerge as Harbingers of Change for Women', *The Express Tribune*, 14 September 2014 <https://tribune.com.pk/story/762685/dukhtar-mary-kom-emerge-as-harbingers-of-change-for-women/> [accessed 29 March 2019].

develop Nazo's relationship with her father, Baba (Syed Tanveer Hussain), an unconventional patriarch who preaches compassion and encourages his daughters to defend themselves in an androcentric world. The film depicts corruption, injustice, and gendered violence in modern Pakistan, exploring the impact of oppression on both the film's female and male characters. Female empowerment in *My Pure Land* is demonstrated through the women's ability to physically defend themselves and reject the notion that their worth and rights are decided by men. Each film uses female leads and female-driven narratives to criticise Pakistan's treatment of women, and the violence this usually entails, culminating with ultimately hopeful dreams for a better and safer future for Pakistani women.

Imagery and Colour

Despite their similar themes, *Dukhtar* and *My Pure Land* look and feel strikingly different, with the most notable contrast seen in their colour palettes. Both films use colour to craft a distinct tone and atmosphere, reflecting the filmmakers' individual approaches to their messages of female independence and empowerment. In most scenes, *My Pure Land* is bright and vivid, the rich turquoises and reds of Nazo's *shalwar kameez* leaping out at the audience as she moves around her home armed with an assault rifle. The beauty of her traditional dress is juxtaposed against the whitewashed walls burning hot in the afternoon sun, the tense action of the siege contrasting with the swirl of her *dupatta* and the jangling of golden anklets and bangles. The movement and colour of Nazo's traditional dress is reminiscent of classic Bollywood heroines and links her to a Pakistani national identity that celebrates its South Asian traditions.[10] Nazo's willingness to defend herself, violently if necessary, complicates South Asian cinema's representation of the 'good woman' who abides patriarchal norms.[11] Her determination to fight for her rights and those of her female family while dressed in gorgeous *shalwar* challenges Pakistan to reconstruct its national identity to value and respect its women and not only the traditions they represent on-screen.

This representation of female empowerment takes place amidst dramatic shots of the landscape. Even in the overwhelming heat and stress of the siege, the surrounding countryside is lit by gorgeous sunsets, where dust clouds kicked up by Mehrban's men evoke in the viewer both anxiety and a sense of warm nostalgia. Masud's rural Pakistan reflects the diasporic ache, frequently romanticised, for home, celebrating the country's beauty whilst shining a spotlight on its social issues. In comparison, *Dukhtar* refuses to romanticise Pakistan, despite shooting on location amongst the ethereal natural beauty of Gilgit-Baltistan, a vibrant and mountainous region in northern Pakistan. As Allah Rakhi and Zainab move through mountain villages and treacherous rocky passes, the landscape is presented in muted grey-blue tones. As they move further south, navigating barren desert sands and sparse plains, Pakistan becomes harsh and sunwashed, effectively conveying the exhaustion and distress of mother and daughter. *Dukhtar* ends with a dedication to Nathaniel's mother, and to her motherland. Here, Pakistan takes on the role of mother, a country that can nurture its people, as reflected in each film's gorgeous landscapes and moments of reflection, but one that has been co-opted by nationalism to uphold violence against and subjugation of women and other marginalised people.[12] Nathaniel and Masud challenge the patriarchal identity of modern Pakistan, highlighting the rift between the beauty of 'home' and the lived reality for Pakistani women.

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[10] Jessica Strubel and Bharath M. Josiam, 'Renegotiating Gender Through Dress in Bollywood: The New Indian Woman', *Fashion, Style & Popular Culture*, 3 (2016), 313–325 (p. 314) <https://doi.org/10.1386/fspc.3.3.313_1>.

[11] Shakuntala Rao, '"I Need an Indian Touch": Glocalization and Bollywood Films', *Journal of International and Intercultural Communication*, 3.1 (2010), 1–19 (p. 7) <https://doi.org/10.1080/17513050903428117>.

[12] Sangeeta Datta, 'Globalisation and Representations of Women in Indian Cinema', *Social Scientist*, 28.3/4 (2000), 71–82 (p. 73) <https://doi.org/10.2307/3518191>.

Where *My Pure Land*'s saturated landscape anchors the film in hope and unrelenting beauty in the face of violence, *Dukhtar* chooses to amplify the constant threat of that same violence. The film's limited palette creates an oppressive atmosphere that keeps the viewer in suspense, refusing to allow the audience to relax when Allah Rakhi and Zainab cannot. *Dukhtar* carries this use of colour across into its characters' costuming, with the plain grey and white *Perahan tunban* worn by henchmen Ghorzang Khan (Adnan Shah) and Shehbaz (Ajab Gul). Allah Rakhi's shawls and *kameez* are maroon and navy, playing off the innocent oranges and pinks that Zainab wears. As with Nazo's dresses in *My Pure Land*, *Dukhtar* uses costuming to establish its characters' personalities and power statuses. We meet Sohail as he drives his truck, its gaudy paint and noisy trinkets clashing with the dry, open desert and becoming a symbol of safety. Nonetheless, Allah Rakhi's meeting with Sohail is suspenseful as she waits to see, as does the audience, whether Sohail will turn them over to their pursuers. Much like Allah Rakhi, the viewer has rapidly learned not to trust any man she comes across, as *Dukhtar* establishes men's capacity for violence and their drive to crush the freedom of Allah Rakhi and her daughter. *Dukhtar* portrays the conflict between female empowerment and Pakistan's current social climate and national identity. Women asserting their rights holds a tension for the nation that is reflected in the film's limited use of colour and its sparse and hostile landscapes, instilling that tension in the viewer as well as in its female characters.

Gender Roles

Sohail eventually wins over Allah Rakhi, proving himself as a protective figure and a love interest, in positive contrast to her previous marital experience as a child bride to Zainab's warlord father. We learn that Sohail is a former *mujahid*, subverting popular notions of Pakistani nationalism; instead of fighting *jihad* for the nation, he chooses to protect women who have been harmed by tribal patriotism, offering an alternative Pakistani male role model. However, his narrative arc foregrounds male compassion, suggesting that Pakistani women require male benevolence in order to be safe under patriarchy. The film portrays Allah Rakhi's courage in her decision to flee but the constant fear and anxiety that follows only fades once she knows that she is safe with Sohail. This reinforces the Pakistani cultural narrative that women's worth is dependent on their relationships with others: Allah Rakhi is valued as a mother, as a daughter estranged from her own mother following her child marriage, and as a lover to Sohail.[13] Whilst the film does demonstrate some possibilities for female empowerment and agency, in Allah Rakhi's determination to escape tribal patriarchy and save her daughter from child marriage, the emphasis on Sohail as a necessary (male) figure in her fight for freedom ultimately undermines Pakistani women's struggles for independent agency.[14] In contrast, *My Pure Land* places its women at the centre of its story, focusing on the power of Nazo, Waderi, and Saeda to fight for their own freedom and determine their own 'honour'. As in *Dukhtar*, *My Pure Land* conveys the ever-present danger of men through casual acts of physical and sexual dominance over women, particularly Nazo. Men are portrayed as corrupt, with Mehrban bribing police to wrongfully imprison Baba and his son Sikander (Atif Akhtar Bhatti). In notable contrast to the flurry of colour that accompanies Nazo during the siege and in childhood sequences, we see Baba languishing in the dark blues and shadows of a dank jail cell. During the siege, there is only one man fighting alongside the women for their rights: Zulfiqar (Tayyab Ifzal), a friend of Sikander's who

[13] Farida Shaheed, 'Contested Identities: Gendered Politics, Gendered Religion in Pakistan', *Third World Quarterly*, 31.6 (2010), 851–867 (p. 859) <https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2010.502710>.

[14] Lubna N. Chaudhry, 'Flowers, Queens, and Goons: Unruly Women in Rural Pakistan', *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 11.1 (2009), 246–267 (p. 263–264) <https://vc.bridgew.edu/jiws/vol11/iss1/16/> [accessed 19 December 2019].

wants to marry Nazo. However, where Nazo and her family are overwhelmed but determined, taking decisive action during the siege, Zulfiqar wavers. In this film, men are not saviours. Instead, they either threaten the women's agency or must learn to uplift women on their own terms. Indeed, Nazo agrees to marry Zulfiqar only on the condition that she retains her independence, refusing to live with his family or give up her right to travel. Both films assert the need for men to join the struggle for gender equality and to use their power under patriarchy to aid women instead of harming them. Yet *My Pure Land* proposes that the future of women's rights comes from the resilience of women first, who must lead the movement and establish their value as separate to their relationships with men.

Women's relationships with other women, specifically through motherhood and daughterhood, are central to each film. In these relationships, women become role models, to each other and to Pakistani women in the audience. Women's emotional strength is matched by their practical drives towards survival. Allah Rakhi is willing to die in order to protect her child, and her prioritisation of her daughter and mother reflects the necessity of female bonds in the face of gendered violence and oppression. After finding safety with Sohail in a remote mountain compound, Allah Rakhi chooses to leave with Zainab once again, this time determined to reunite with her mother in an attempt to break free from their male oppressors. In both films, motherhood is multi-faceted. In *My Pure Land,* it is Waderi and not the gentle Baba who prepares Nazo and Saeda for patriarchy and men's inevitable attempts to curb their rights. We witness several flashbacks where Baba teaches the girls about autonomy and female empowerment through stories, encouraging them to value themselves as individuals rather than wives or daughters. Waderi scoffs at his words, understanding that stories are not enough to keep the girls safe. She teaches them how to shoot and physically defend themselves, as well as impressing the importance of hiding their emotions, which men will take as a sign of weakness and submission. The feminine beauty of the girls' traditional dress and Nazo's heartbreak following the wrongful imprisonment of her father serve to emphasise the power in their resistance against Mehrban. After the siege begins, Waderi saves three bullets for the family's suicide if the men break through. Ignoring Zulfiqar's protests that suicide is a sin, she asserts the need to protect their honour as women who will not allow the men to rob them of their land, bodies, and lives. The film challenges notions of honour within Pakistani culture, understanding that 'honour' is valued but frequently used to dominate and harm women.[15] *My Pure Land* suggests that the concept of honour must be reframed to decentre men, eliminate the patriarchal distinction between 'male' and 'female' honour, and include actions that assert womens' rights to freedom, independence, and justice.[16] By the end of the film, Nazo has acted 'honourably' by defending her birthright and ensuring her mother and sister can continue to live in their family home, actions that would be praised if performed by a man but which are currently seen as rebellious and dishonourable when performed by a woman.

Reception and impact

Both filmmakers blend the beauty of Pakistan's diverse geography, aesthetics, and traditional practices with the tension and fear provoked by its male-dominated national and cultural identities. This complicates notions of Pakistan and its culture, holding contemporary Pakistan accountable for its violence against women whilst simultaneously challenging western preconceptions of the country as 'barbaric' and inhospitable, and its women as weak, in need of western interventionism and rescue. Despite predominantly European funding, Nathaniel and Masud have been acclaimed by Pakistani critics for their recognisably

[15] Gill and Brah, pp. 73–74.

[16] Rochelle L. Terman, 'To Specify or Single Out: Should We Use the Term "Honor Killing"?', *Muslim World Journal of Human Rights*, 7.1 (2010), 1–39 (p. 8) <https://doi.org/10.2202/1554-4419.1162>.

Pakistani narratives, cast, and cinematography, positively contributing to the ongoing revival of Pakistani cinema.[17] Both films have also been praised for presenting a more complex perspective on Pakistan to the West, and for their explorations of the prevalent issue of gendered violence in Pakistan.[18] Using cinema to both reflect and shape cultural narratives, *Dukhtar* and *My Pure Land* aim to challenge mainstream perceptions of Pakistani women, which victimise and blame women for gendered violence.[19] Alongside critical acclaim, *Dukhtar* made a modest taking of Rs1.65 crore[20] at the box office, but *My Pure Land* did not receive a cinematic release in Pakistan due to controversy over its subject matter.[21] As with *Dukhtar*, *My Pure Land* launched on Netflix in Pakistan, and later India, but this limited release obscures insight into the film's mainstream appeal and subsequent chances of encouraging social change within Pakistan.[22]

Nonetheless, Pakistani cinema's claiming of each film reasserts their importance within the resurgence of the nation's film industry and within broader Pakistani culture. Zahid Yousaf *et al*. suggest that the revival of Pakistani cinema has created a space for social dramas such as *Dukhtar*, allowing contemporary films about women's rights issues to reorient gendered power hierarchies within their narratives.[23] In *Dukhtar*, this can be seen in Allah Rakhi's decision to take responsibility for her daughter's safety and freedom, wresting power away from male warlords and their henchmen, although the film falls short by foregrounding a male saviour, Sohail. In *My Pure Land*, Nazo steps into the role of protector, determining her own fate and denying male power over her body and liberty. Both films move beyond simply featuring female leads to present the audience with women who demand better social, political, and economic status, which Abdul Hadi argues is necessary to enact meaningful social change for women.[24] Nazo asserts her economic independence through the defence of her home, whilst Allah Rakhi refuses to allow her daughter's child marriage, insisting on a higher sociopolitical status for both herself and Zainab. These films work in tandem with broader global movements for women's rights in Pakistan and diasporic communities to challenge gendered violence and promote Pakistani women's rights issues worldwide. Indeed, *Dukhtar* was shown at the first Pakistan Film Festival, at the United Nations Headquarters in New York City in 2016, in an effort to represent Pakistan in the west as a cultural force and as a nation willing to address its social issues.[25] This prioritises the agency of Pakistani women by uplifting the voice of a female filmmaker and the film's female subjects, and this may go some way to challenge nationalist patriarchy at

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[17] Maliha Rehman, 'Movie Review: *Dukhtar* – a Story Well-Told', *Dawn*, 18 September 2014 <https://www.dawn.com/news/1132747> [accessed 31 March 2019]; Anealla Safdar, 'Sarmad Masud on Feminism, *My Pure Land*, and Pakistan', *Al Jazeera*, 2 October 2017 <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/09/sarmad-masud-feminism-pure-land-pakistan-170926125300261.html> [accessed 2 April 2019].

[18] Christopher Zumski Finke, 'A Quarter of Pakistani Girls Are Married Before They're 18. This Film Shows What That Feels Like', *YES! Magazine*, 4 November 2015 <https://www.yesmagazine.org/happiness/a-quarter-of-pakistani-girls-are-married-before-theyre-eighteen-this-film-shows-what-that-feels-like> [accessed 31 March 2019].

[19] Shumaila Ahmed, 'Violence Against Women: Media Representation of Violent Issues in the Perspective of Pakistan', *Science International*, 26.1 (2014), 367–371 (pp. 370–371) <https://www.sci-int.com/pdf/13990516070-367-371-----Shamiala%20Ahmad--CO--IRFAN__%20SS--Malaysia.pdf> [accessed 2 April 2019].

[20] *i.e.* Rs 16,500,000. Approximately £82,500 in February 2020.

[21] Shafiq Ul Hasan, '*My Pure Land*: One of the Finest Independent Films of Pakistan, Yet Forbidden in its Own Country', *The Express Tribune Blogs*, 21 March 2018 <https://blogs.tribune.com.pk/story/65074/my-pure-land-one-of-the-finest-independent-films-of-pakistan-yet-forbidden-in-its-own-country/> [accessed 2 April 2019].

[22] Mishaal Siddiqui, '*My Pure Land* Now on Netflix in India and Pakistan!', *Hip In Pakistan*, 7 June 2018 <https://www.hipinpakistan.com/news/1155077> [accessed 2 April 2019].

[23] Zahid Yousaf, Malik Adnan, and Iffat Ali Aksar, 'Challenges of Patriarchal Ideologies in Pakistani Cinema: A Case of Feminist Depiction in Films', *Global Media Journal: Pakistan Edition*, 10.1 (2017), 87–107.

[24] Abdul Hadi, 'Patriarchy and Gender-Based Violence in Pakistan', *European Journal of Social Science Education and Research*, 4.4 (2017), 297–304 (p. 298) <http://journals.euser.org/index.php/ejser/article/view/2485> [accessed 2 April 2019].

[25] 'Pakistani Film "*Dukhtar*" Attracts Large Audience at UN', *Geo News*, 16 March 2017 <https://www.geo.tv/latest/134539-Pakistani-film-Dukhtar-attracts-large-audience-at-UN> [accessed 2 April 2019].

home and in the diaspora. However, the screening may also indicate that the film's limited representation of female empowerment, one that can only be achieved with rescue from benevolent men, may be more acceptable to both Pakistani and western audiences than narratives such as that of *My Pure Land*, which emphasises female independence and women-led movements for equality and justice.[26] *My Pure Land* pushes the boundaries of gendered cultural norms further by featuring dark-skinned amateur actors like Suhaee Abro to faithfully represent rural Pakistani women, rejecting the glorification of white western beauty standards and the association of those standards with female power and freedom, both in the West and in South Asia.[27]

As diasporic filmmakers, Nathaniel and Masud have constructed provocative debut features that add to the growing body of Pakistani social dramas that explore complicated issues with a critical lens on Pakistani patriarchy and corruption, whilst refusing to conform to simplistic western and imperialist attitudes towards Pakistan and its people. By featuring female leads and female-driven narratives, *Dukhtar* and *My Pure Land* help to carve out space within Pakistani cinema and broader society to amplify the voices of women and to highlight the everyday struggle that women face within modern Pakistan and the diaspora. *Dukhtar* does complicate its message of female emancipation by placing Sohail at the centre of Allah Rakhi's story but nonetheless offers a representation of female agency and strength that urges a shift in women's social standing. *My Pure Land* pushes this message further with a dark-skinned female cast fighting, without aid from men, for their economic and sociopolitical rights, highlighting possibilities for enacting female empowerment in Pakistan. The critical success of films made by or starring women paves the way to greater variety within the independent Pakistani film industry, and to reflective films that serve to examine Pakistani society and offer an alternative vision of the future, one where people of all genders and backgrounds can be free and safe in their motherland.

[26] Filomena M. Critelli and Jennifer Willett, 'Struggle and Hope: Challenging Gender Violence in Pakistan', *Critical Sociology*, 39 (2012), 201–221 (pp. 201–202) <https://doi.org/10.1177/0896920512438780>.

[27] Annie Paul, 'Beyond the Pale? Skinderella Stories and Colourism in India', *Ideaz,* 14 (2016), 133–145 (p. 135) <http://www.ideaz-institute.com/Ideaz%20J%20Volumes/vol%2014a.pdf> [accessed 19 December 2019].

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