Intimate Connections

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Intimate Connections

Love and Marriage in Pakistan's High Mountains

ANNA-MARIA WALTER



RUTGERS UNIVERSITY PRESS

NEW BRUNSWICK, CAMDEN, AND NEWARK, NEW JERSEY, AND LONDON

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS CATALOGING-IN-PUBLICATION DATA

Names: Walter, Anna-Maria, author.
Title: Intimate connections : Love and Marriage in Pakistan's High Mountains / Anna-Maria Walter.
Description: New Brunswick : Rutgers University Press, 2022. | Series: Politics of marriage and gender: global issues in local contexts | Includes bibliographical references and index.
Identifiers: LCCN 2021009985 | ISBN 9781978820487 (paperback) | ISBN 9781978820494 (hardcover) | ISBN 9781978820500 (epub) | ISBN 9781978820517 (mobi) | ISBN 9781978820524 (pdf)
Subjects: LCSH: Man-woman relationships—Pakistan. | Man-woman relationships—Religious aspects—Islam. | Muslim women—Pakistan. | Intimacy (Psychology) | Marriage—Religious aspects—Islam.
Classification: LCC HQ930.5 .W35 2022 | DDC 306.709549l—dc23
LC record available at https://lccn.loc.gov/2021009985

A British Cataloging-in-Publication record for this book is available from the British Library.

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♾ The paper used in this publication meets the requirements of the American National Standard for Information Sciences—Permanence of Paper for Printed Library Materials, ANSI Z39.48-1992.

www.rutgersuniversitypress.org

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For all the Seemas, Guls, and Sheilas, and the other
strong women of Gilgit-Baltistan

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SERIES FOREWORD

The politics of marriage (and divorce) is an often-used strategic tool in various social, cultural, economic, and political identity projects, as well as in symbolic conflicts between ethnic, national, or religious communities. Despite having multiple strategic applicabilities, pervasiveness in everyday life, and huge significance in performing and managing identities, the politics of marriage is surprisingly underrepresented both in the international book publishing market and the social sciences.

The Politics of Marriage and Gender: Global Issues in Local Contexts is a series from Rutgers University Press examining the politics of marriage as a phenomenon embedded into and intensely interacting with much broader social, cultural, economic, and political processes and practices such as globalization, transnationalization, international migration, human trafficking, vertical social mobility, the creation of symbolic boundaries between ethnic populations, nations, religious denominations, or classes, family formation, or struggles for women's and children's rights. The series primarily aims to analyze practices, ideologies, and interpretations related to the politics of marriage, and to outline the dynamics and diversity of relatedness—interplay and interdependence, for instance—between the politics of marriage and the broader processes and practices mentioned above. In other words, most books in the series devote special attention to how the politics of marriage and these processes and practices mutually shape and explain each other.

The series concentrates on, among other things, the complex relationships between the politics of marriage and gender, ethnic, national, religious, racial, and class identities globally, and examines how these relationships contribute to the development and management of social, cultural, and political differences, inequalities, and conflicts.

The series seeks to publish single-authored books and edited volumes that develop gap-filling and thought-provoking critical perspectives that balance a high degree of theoretical sophistication and empirical richness well, and that cross or rethink disciplinary, methodological, or theoretical boundaries. The thematic scope of the series is intentionally left broad to encourage creative submissions that fit within the perspectives outlined above.

Among the potential topics closely connected with the problem sensitivity of the series are "honor"-based violence, arranged (forced, child, etc.) marriage, transnational marriage markets, migration, and brokerage, intersections of marriage and religion/class/race, the politics of agency and power within marriage, reconfiguration of family (same-sex marriage/union), the politics of love, intimacy, and desire, marriage and multicultural families, the (religious, legal, etc.) politics of divorce, the causes, forms, and consequences of polygamy in contemporary societies, sport marriage, refusing marriage, and so forth.

Anna-Maria Walter's *Intimate Connections* is a fascinating, ethnographically informed account of how women actively participate in constant reinterpretation and reorganization of gender and conjugal relations in Gilgit District in Pakistan's northernmost mountain area. Based on a total of fourteen months of anthropological fieldwork, Walter convincingly demonstrates that love provides an insightful lens for a deeper understanding of how global discourses, ideologies, and patterns of intimacy shape local patriarchal ideals, value regimes, and power relations. Besides portraying the complexity of Muslim women's subjectivity, *Intimate Connections* highlights how power, sexuality, and gender dynamics, as well as the politics of kinship work within and outside the family, and explains how these factors contribute to and are formed by changing configurations of love and marriage in a politically marginalized South Asian region. It also gives a detailed picture of why and how the introduction and popularity of mobile phones have led to the emergence of mobile phone romances offering a new way for creating pre-marital intimate relationships and increasing young people's individual agency in choosing a marriage partner.

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PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Intimate Connections focuses on the relationships between women and men. It is, however, a product of the relationships between an anthropologist and her interlocutors. My hosts welcomed me into their families, showed me around the area, and introduced me to friends and relatives. They tolerated my first stuttering Urdu sentences, patiently waited as someone translated from Shina, answered my many questions, and posed others themselves. I had arrived in Gilgit-Baltistan intending to research mobile phone usage, but the women who befriended me led me in new directions. As we spent hours together, cooking, making bread, caring for children, and talking before the crackling warmth of the fireplace in the center of Gilgiti houses, they discussed love, marriage, sexual relations, family matters, and proper comportment. They generously shared their lives with me and inquired about my own, back in Germany. Young women seemed to have an urge to confide to an outsider, while older women seemed to want to ensure that I understood the historic, social, and religious context for all the love stories I heard about or witnessed. I have changed the names of my collaborators to respect their privacy, but this book would not exist without the women of Gilgit-Baltistan, the men of their families, my research assistant Rizwan Latif, and the many other people with whom I had close and productive relationships in and around Gilgit. Even after some time at home, I can still evoke the sensations of a crowded living room, women chatting and laughing or exchanging confidences in hushed tones. I miss those times, and am thankful that I was permitted to get a sense of Gilgit's private worlds. I hope to be back soon.

An extensive research project cannot be completed without the support of strong academic and personal networks. My biggest gratitude goes to my parents. They taught me that no truth is absolute, that various perspectives exist on any subject, and that I should trust myself to pursue my own way—values that led me to the field of anthropology. They modeled the critical empathy that pervades my work.

My doctoral supervisor at LMU Munich, Martin Sökefeld, managed to tread a fine line between carefully facilitating my research and giving me space to explore and develop my own arguments, guided by both scholarship and intuition. Our research project, "The Appropriation of Mobile Telephony in Gilgit-Baltistan,"

was generously funded by the German Research Foundation (DFG), and strengthened by collaboration with Quaid-I-Azam University's DAAD Professor Andrea Fleschenberg and the Hanns-Seidel-Foundation in Islamabad.

When I began my fieldwork, Monika Schneid connected me with her local friend circle; her excellent rapport provided the best field entrance possible. Sharing her own experiences in Gilgit, my colleague Anna Grieser prepared me to carefully consider my role in the field. Further along the way, my participation in the interdisciplinary research project, "The Researchers' Affect," at the Free University (FU) Berlin, coordinated by Thomas Stodulka, helped me productively examine my own positionality and emotional disposition during fieldwork.

Back home in Munich, Martin Saxer and his Highland Asia team were intellectually inspiring. They have greatly enriched our department's academic culture, as well as our private garden parties. Special thanks goes to Martin himself, who has the wonderful ability to inspire fascination and motivation for ethnographic originality, and to Alessandro Rippa and Aditi Saraf, who shared their academic experiences and networks with me and provided valuable feedback on my writing. I am also greatly indebted to Henrike Donner, Philipp Schorch, Roger Norum, Galen Murton, Maria Beimborn, Oliver Liebig, Philipp Zehmisch and Carolin Märtens for their critical comments on data analysis, scholarly debates, text production, and so much else. I want to thank all my colleagues from the Institute of Social and Cultural Anthropology at LMU for their stimulating discussions, and the merry rounds of ouzo in "paradise."

While the contents of this book are based on my PhD thesis, "Intimate Connections: Conjugal Affection amid Gilgit's High Mountains, Islamic Doctrines and Mobile Phones," accepted by the Faculty for the Study of Culture at Ludwig-Maximilians-University (LMU) Munich in 2018, turning a dissertation into readable book form was a long and laborious process I could not have accomplished without Péter Berta, editor of the wonderful Politics of Marriage and Gender series. Several anonymous reviewers' thorough engagement with the text encouraged me to reorganize my material, sharpen my arguments and improve their presentation. I only succeeded in this process with the competent advice by Megan Pugh. Special thanks also goes to Rutgers's University Press editor Jasper Chang, who patiently assisted me throughout the publication process.

While researching the myriad forms love can take, I sometimes found myself trapped in intellectual hibernation. My partner Zahid Imroz shook me back "into the day" and showed me what love can be. His creativity and ceaseless interest in social and political matters keep our conversations lively and contribute to my personal and professional growth. I was only able to complete this book thanks to his patient support, before and especially after the birth of our daughter, Selma Coco. She has brought challenge, wonder and delight to all of our days. Now we are looking forward to the next chapter: before holding the final print of this book in hand, we will be welcoming another addition to our family.

NOTE ON TRANSCRIPTION

The vast majority of my fieldwork was carried out in Urdu, which is Pakistan's lingua franca. With the help of informal translators, a few interviews and conversations were conducted in Shina, Gilgit's local language. I have translated this material into English for data presentation, but retain local terms for certain core concepts, and preserve others in parentheses behind their English translation to facilitate analysis. I use the ALA-LC standard of romanization for Urdu words. Shina language does not have a standardized form of writing, so I base my transcriptions on the spelling of a local research assistant. For commonly anglicized terms, such as Sunni, Shia and Ismaili or rupee, as well as names, places and titles of films or songs, I use conventional English spelling.

Intimate Connections



FIGURE 1 Administrative divisions of Pakistan with Gilgit-Baltistan as northernmost territory, 2010. University of Texas Libraries.

1

Politics of the Sensible

In the most popular Shina song of 2014, a male and female voice sing to one another: "Talk to me, talk (*Morek thay nay, ma sath morek thay).*"[1] This was one of the first times that a woman had been commercially recorded in the local language of the area around Gilgit, the city at the center of Pakistan's northernmost region of Gilgit-Baltistan. Young people listened to the song enthusiastically, sometimes dancing along, while elders complained about the decay of morals. The lyrics call for an immediate and open exchange between young women and men, or girls and boys, as locals refer to unmarried women and men. Such communication would violate the area's generally strict gender segregation. When engaging directly with men girls are seen to lack modesty and respectability. Yet, the region's youth were sympathetic to the desire for such intimacy. When public controversy erupts, young women have to position themselves against the threat of denunciation. Consequently, most of them did not interpret the song as a guide for contact outside marriage, but as reflective of the type of connection they hope to establish with their betrothed.

Across the region of Gilgit-Baltistan, gender relations are generally shaped by *parda,* which translates literally as "curtain." Put simply, women occupy the private sphere, and men, the public. Girls and boys incorporate this social order of distance and segregation from earliest childhood on. Girls learn to practice veiling and comport their bodies with a reserved conduct known as *sharm.* These actions both guide their public behavior and generate a deeply embodied sense of modesty that molds their innermost thoughts and feelings. Such emotional restraint works to safeguard them, for example, against being emotionally overpowered by passionate love. Nevertheless, most women take an eager interest in marital relationships, whether as girls assessing their own prospects, as mothers who are responsible for their offspring's futures, as mature women narrating their own stories, or—for women of all ages—as members of a

group, sharing and gossiping about the details of other peoples' lives. In such conversations, the tone often switches between fascination with romance and concern about the perceived degeneration of young women's decorum.

In such a framework a common bias arises: Are emotions of modesty and respectability authentic or performed? Or more particularly: In a place where most marriages are arranged, what is the role of emotions in marriage? How is affection experienced, conceptualized, materialized? What motivates spouses to love and care for one another? And what is a young woman's leverage in her family, toward her husband, in society? Tracing ideas and practices of love, this book sets out to answer these questions through in-depth ethnographic work, as well as by engaging with literature on marriage and kinship in South Asia and on the anthropology of emotions. I argue that even as gender segregation and women's modesty remain the norm, women and men in the area are reenacting existing conceptions of love and forging new modes of conjugality.

Nestled in the steep valleys of the Karakoram and Himalaya mountain ranges, Gilgit-Baltistan's residents come from a variety of ethnic and religious backgrounds. The majority are Twelver Shia, followed by a smaller number of Sunni. There are also Ismaili Muslims who, despite formally counting as Sevener Shia, are locally depicted as distinct group. The Twelver Shia of the region usually hold the legal wedding ceremony (*nikāḥ*) separately from the social wedding (*shādī*). Although *nikāḥ* is the official Islamic wedding, local customs demand avoidance and distance between spouses until their *shādī*, when the marriage is socially implemented in the form of a big celebration, after which the bride moves to her husband's family's house. During the intervening period, girls have traditionally been so shy that they hide from their husbands. As such, *nikāḥ* functions as an irreversible engagement, a means to reserve and cement good matches, while giving young people time to grow up before they begin their relationship. Only during recent years has this practice become the focus of intense negotiations. Reformists, made up of *sayyids* (descendants of Prophet Muhammad) and Shiite religious scholars (*sheikhs*), have propagated the marriage contract's "correct" function as the sole legitimate wedding according to Islamic law. They argue that Islamic rules outlaw older, "uninformed" practices that keep couples from communicating after their *nikāḥ*. Celebrations around *shādī* were outed as mere cultural rituals. The younger generations happily promote this relaxation of rules, which allows them to incorporate changing ideas about the place of love in, or even as precursor to, marriage.

As these interpretations have been increasingly adapted by educated Shia to demonstrate knowledge, piety, and sophistication, the door has opened for a wide range of dating practices after the *nikāḥ*: from platonic flirtation via SMS to nights spent together at the girl's parents' house. To a lesser extent, changes in (pre)marital relationships also occur within the local Sunni and Ismaili communities, whose younger generations increasingly get in touch with future

spouses after a formal betrothal but before a public marriage ceremony. Since engagements are fragile social commitments that can easily be dissolved, self-determination and growing conjugal companionship are perceived as threats to chastity and obedience. Although Sunni and Ismaili couples nowadays interact to varying degrees before being properly married, they are usually not left without a chaperone.

Since couples in Gilgit profess growing interest in each other, both before and after marriage, they bring about substantial shifts of relationship and power dynamics in Gilgit's kinship system. Where life revolves around the family compound in a neighborhood of extended kin, young people's focus on their romantic partner can pit their own conjugal unity against older generations or same-sex companionship. Even more drastically, young people might independently choose lovers of their own, putting their interests above their families'. Ethnographic examples will show that these developments coincide with the introduction and popularity of mobile phones, which I heard one male head of a household rail against as causing "the end of love." "*Moḥabbat pfash begin*," he said, in a mix of Gilgit's local language, Shina, and Pakistan's lingua franca, Urdu. Instead of describing romantic attachment, here *moḥabbat* (love) stands for affectionate relationships among family members, loving ties that he saw severed by youths' attention drifting elsewhere. Love for the bigger family setup might be perceived to be under threat, but romantic feelings are certainly on the rise, molding older concepts into new forms. While a handful of young people violate social or religious boundaries by eloping or having affairs, the majority of young women in Gilgit strive to redefine conjugal intimacy by making romance part of arranged marriage. In this way, love can be seen as reflecting a desire for recognition, for female empowerment and self-determination.

The younger generations of Gilgit-Baltistan sometimes feel they are confronted with what a local poet described to me as "mountain mentality," as though the peaks that surround this remote location block not only the view but also the mind. Set at an altitude of 1,500 meters, at the crossroads of some of the world's highest mountain ranges, the Karakoram, Hindukush, and Himalaya, Gilgit's harsh terrain might easily be characterized as contributing to its perceived backwardness. Although prone to hazards like landslides, the only all-season direct land route to mainland Pakistan, the Karakorum Highway (KKH), makes the region accessible for trade, tourists, and the military, and makes it possible for residents to commute out to Pakistan's metropolises for education and job opportunities. The city's population has consequently grown significantly and some 100,000 of the region's roughly 1.5 million inhabitants live in the greater Gilgit area.[2] While the region's political status as disputed territory between Pakistan and India has fueled postcolonial criticism, in late 2020 the Pakistani government announced it would grant "provisional provincial status" to Gilgit-Baltistan—until the time this book was copyedited in 2021, no further

steps have been taken to fulfill this promise. Despite the region's remoteness and political limbo, the level of education is very high, especially among the youth. Education and women's empowerment have been part of the agenda of the international Aga Khan Foundation, which has led development throughout Gilgit-Baltistan. While the majority of my young interlocutors never considered organizing protests for equality, they saw themselves as modern, enlightened women. Pursuing love and publicly acknowledging the existence of their emotions are signs that local girls are gaining confidence and self-assurance. Without following an explicitly feminist agenda that might call for rebelling against a patriarchal system, young women and men join in the struggle to carve out a place for their own feelings within families and a society that have tended to value relationships for other reasons.

Both local and academic narratives tend to polarize "love marriages" and "arranged marriages," but that split fails to do justice to the complexity of conjugal relationships. Even feminist intersectional analyses, which value the entanglement within countless networks as integral factors of women's lives, often hold on to an essentializing, binary understanding of power structures, and tend to produce victims the moment they argue for them (Abu-Lugod 2013; Povinelli 2006). Because I want to avoid the stereotypes that position Muslim women as passive objects, I present personal, and at times intimate, stories from my interlocutors, to show but also scrutinize how they make decisions, understand their own experiences, and react both emotionally and strategically to the contours of their society (cf. Mookherjee 2013). For many of these women, the prolonged liminal phase between formal wedding (*nikāḥ*) and social implementation of the marriage (*shādī*) in the particular setting of the Shia community in Gilgit-Baltistan provides room in which they can explore and remake their understandings of love, both outside—but especially within—the heteronormative conjugal relationship.

Those changes are evident in the way my friend Yasmin told me the story of her own marriage, as we sipped tea together in the courtyard of her house in Gilgit. To align herself with the growing popularity of arranged "love marriages," Yasmin smoothed over parts of her story and altered others. Her marriage, to a cousin who was few years her senior, had been arranged in the typical way, by talks between their parents. Having been married for about five years now, the couple seemed to get along well, although the interactions I observed did not seem to be characterized by great enthusiasm or passion. Yasmin, however, proudly portrayed their story as one of great love. Even before the official marriage proposal, she told me, she had favored her now-husband, and recruited her older sisters to recommend this man to her parents. Her initial shyness and insecurities in front of him, she said, were signs of sincere love. When I mentioned Yasmin's account to her older sisters, they were surprised. Yasmin's husband had lived with his uncle's—that is, Yasmin's father's—family for some years while

finishing his higher education in Gilgit city. Being approximately the same age and living in the same house, they must have flirted, but her sisters had seen no sign that Yasmin was any more attached to her now-husband than to any other cousin. Yasmin had obviously reframed the past to serve the present. Now that she was married, she nursed the memory of trading secret looks with her husband, and similarly playful moments with other cousins faded into insignificance. Contemporary discourse shapes both how we assess and what we expect of our lives, and when we reconceptualize our own history accordingly, we strengthen new norms. Yasmin's shifting self-portrayal, for example, both reflects her view of her conjugal relationship and places new expectations on it. She increasingly complained about her husband's lack of attention, which had not been a problem for her in their early years, when mutual attraction was not an important indicator for the success of a marriage. Now she seemed to look to him for proof of their love.

An Anthropology of Intimacy

As I consider the worlds of my interlocutors in Gilgit-Baltistan, I take to heart the call that Andrew Beatty makes in his recent book *Emotional Worlds: Beyond an Anthropology of Emotions* (2019). After two decades of publishing on emotions, Beatty aims here to take emotions from their small corner, as a subdiscipline of psychological anthropology, into the center of the field. Although he engages with various theories of emotion across time and disciplines, he seeks not to confine emotions to a set of criteria, but to widen their methodological and analytical scope, so they can develop their full potential as "frames of understanding, social antennae, monitors of comportment, vehicles of political rhetoric, discursive justifications, and indicators of social boundaries" (16). Because emotions are central to human interaction, Beatty suggests we should use them, mindfully, as prerequisites for approaching any socio-cultural facets. Instead of conceptual agendas like agency, materiality, or ontological perspectives, emotions are the central frame of reference with which I understand my interlocutors' experiences, evocations, and evaluations of love.

Emotions allow, or even call for, an integrative approach to social life that takes different directions of experience and embodiment into consideration, thus offering a chance to productively tap rich anthropological debates of mind and body. "*Dil men chupānā cāhī'e thā* (She should have hidden [her emotions] in the heart)," commented one of my female interlocutors, when describing a young woman who had surrendered to romantic sentimentality. Although this expression might suggest an epistemological separation of body and mind, it would reduce the statement to semantic dimensions and not do justice to the context in which the advice was expressed. The speaker locates feelings in the heart, ascribing them to the biological body, while proposing what seems to be a very



FIGURE 2 View of a rural valley in Gilgit-Baltistan.
Photo by the author.

conscious action to discipline these emotions, not only via outward performance but in the core of one's whole being. Another comment also hints at this synchronization of physical behavior and emotion: "*Usko bardāsht karnā cāhī'e thā* (She should have accepted and tolerated it)." The urge to control one's inner life, so to speak, transcends the divide between biology and sociology, and shows how the binaries we tend to associate with the study of emotion—including not just body and mind, but also nature and culture, inner and outer, structure and practice—fall apart.

In her book on the performance of suffering of Pakhtun women in western Pakistan, for example, Benedicte Grima ([1992] 2007) rejects the dichotomy of an inner self and outer person. Instead of aligning their inside feelings with outside requirements, Grima's interlocutors suppress and negate the existence of an "inside" so that conformity to norms becomes the only "authentic" persona; they "strive to close the gap between culture and the individual" (9). Critics might question if the Pakhtun women Grima describes really feel this way, a comment I have also faced when presenting my work in academic circles. Such reactions seem to emerge from the deeply rooted, Euro-American belief in the authenticity of certain interior, individual feelings over staged social performances. This bias can lead to academic imperialism over interlocutors' thoughts and feelings, and upholds the legacy of "Othering" research partners far more than supposedly naïve projections, such as taking a woman at her word when she says she is in love.

That constructivist view on feelings has been shaped by—conspicuously, mostly women—anthropologists (Abu-Lughod 1986; Rosaldo 1984; Scheper-Hughes [1989] 1993; Wikan 1990) who since the 1980s have advanced emotions as "not precultural but preeminently cultural" (Lutz, [1988] 1998, 5). The recent "turn to affect" has striven to overcome the tension between relativizing notions of constructivist approaches and visions of emotions' universality[3] but has, in fact, resulted in a juxtaposition of preconscious, bodily affect, and self-reflective assessment.[4] In that line of thought, emotions involve a cognitive process of recognition of feelings, which themselves connote physiological and psychological conditions resulting from a certain stimulus. However, strict lines between these emotion terms and concepts serve to obscure anthropological insight more than they clarify it. In life as it is actually lived, feelings, emotions, and affects conflate, co-construct each other and have fluid boundaries. Emotions are shaped by both individual and cultural models of interpretation and expression, and therefore cannot be pinned down to a list of specific characteristics (Beatty 2014, 550). As a consequence, I use the terms "emotions" and "feelings" interchangeably and draw on the concept of "affect" only in its adjective or verbal form to allude to its connective and communicative capacity of transferring (re)action between agents, thus dissolving the self-contained quality of entities.

Intimacy poignantly captures this interpersonal, intersubjective orientation of emotions; emotions communicate between, even consolidate the typical polarity of socio-cultural conditioning and people's agentive potential. So does love. It manifests between people, and, as my work in Gilgit-Baltistan helped me to see, is not only felt spontaneously but is actively forged through intimate interactions. Based on her work in a different location in Pakistan, Laura Ring (2006) makes a similar observation. Describing conjugal relationships among the multiethnic, working-class residents of a Karachi apartment building, she identifies intimacy as a feature of familiarity, equality, and freedom, an unguarded emotional expression. Such informality should not be taken for granted as inherently positive—intimacy can be a feature of vile, even abusive relations—but whatever the setting, intimate knowledge eludes the reductive juxtaposition of individual freedom and collective constraint (Povinelli 2006) and allows people to transcend the borders of the self. Many of my interlocutors appreciate the close relationships they were able to develop with their husbands before their formal marriages as emotional support to enter the home of their in-laws.

Given the prevalence of close-knit kinship systems in South Asia, scholarship on the region has a long tradition of pondering the relationships between the individual and the collective. Observations that social hierarchies often overrule personal autonomy have led anthropologists to conceptualize persons as "dividuals," emphasizing their divisibility that allows for flexible adjustment to social influences (Marriott 1976; Strathern 1988). While challenging the Cartesian model of an independent, thinking self, which effectively lacks the

congruency of a secluded interiority, such projects were heavily critiqued as simplifying local realities and denying (non-Euro-American) people the potential for introspection (Ram, 1994; LiPuma 1998). They have, however, prepared the ground for anthropology's increasing awareness that self-perception is inevitably a product of enmeshment with the social environment. While early scholarship on emotions wrestled with the conceptualizations of a "private, closed-in subject confronting the external, public world" (Ingold 2006, 187), recent thinkers argue that we should see selfhood universally as more or less porous (Taylor 2007), with permeable boundaries for social forces and meanings, or as Tim Ingold (2006) puts it, as an ever-changing organism in social relations. Accordingly, I value emotions as way of relating to the world. As forces that emerge from interaction, feelings integrate a person's conscious and unconscious, both of which are embedded in a socio-historic context. To unfold what seems to be a long-standing theoretical impediment, I pay close attention to the entanglement of emotions and the body.

The mind is not an abstract computer encapsulated in the body: The body itself is "the instrument by which information and knowledge is received and meaning is generated" (Grosz 1994, 87). The anthropologist-cum-sociologist Pierre Bourdieu ([1972] 1977) identifies the "socially informed body" (124) as key to a person's perception of reality. Through practice, social habits become internalized and structure all subsequent experiences—one's line of thought, one's demeanor, taste, and emotions—in what Bourdieu famously calls the *habitus*. Such deeply embodied social knowledge, penetrating even cerebral connections (Bull and Mitchell 2015), appears to be the individual's "authentic" interior opinion or feeling instead of a social imperative. Once one has grasped the underlying rationale, it is unnecessary to learn every behavior from scratch; we know intuitively what to think and feel. *Habitus* provides us with what Bourdieu calls a "feel for the game" (Bourdieu [1980] 1990, 66), but the game can well be influenced by its players. What's more, incorporated *habitus* and performative acts mutually amplify and reproduce each other (Walter 2016). In Gilgit, women who adhere to *parda* rules, such as maintaining a downcast posture and averting their eyes when in public, simultaneously express subconscious feelings, repeat expected models of behavior, and reinforce that behavior for others.

A Gilgiti woman can unite many different and sometimes competing roles within herself: She might be a loving daughter, demanding sister, obedient wife, passionate lover, and a widow living with her late husband's family. She can be both a Shia Muslim and an adherent of shamanism, a schoolteacher and a well-reputed *na't* (Muslim prayer) singer. Her cousins and friends can admire her dancing skills while her mother-in-law berates her for neglecting her household. She might access and live out these different versions of herself because she was exposed to different environments—her family's farming village, the college she attended in Rawalpindi, her husband's rich family of government servants in

Gilgit City—and had time to acquire and embody the respective *habitūs* (plural). She learned to juggle her actions and maneuver her motivations according to these different roles, which can also entail consciously restraining herself from living up to different versions of her self—which is especially true in a time of constant connectivity through communication technologies that render multiple contexts present simultaneously (Walter forthcoming).

Social rules may precede the individual, but they only become reality through people's performance and action. Based on an elaborate discussion of speech acts, the feminist philosopher Judith Butler (1997) credits all actions—and speech is but one specific configuration of an act—with performative power in the production of the subject: Whatever we do or react to has an effect. According to Hanafi jurisprudence, a Sunni husband can pronounce divorce by repeating the word *ṭalāq* (divorce) three times in a row and the marriage will immediately be dissolved. The utterance works not on its own, but because it takes place within a context that recognizes its meaning. Hence, Butler's performativity points to the fact that a person does not perform a certain role, but her acts are performative for the self. From action, sensory perception derives, so repeated behavior becomes unconsciously incorporated and affects the mind. In her newer work, *Senses of the Subject* (2015), Butler zeroes in on the materiality of the bodily *habitus* that enacts norms at the same time as it constitutes the subject. Since norms do not exist independently of lived social life and need to be enacted, they are vulnerable, unstable, and flexible. People can fail to perpetuate them, or re-appropriate them instead of merely consolidating them. In this way, Butler has not only added another layer of the radical constructive character of social life to our understanding but has also recovered the agential role of each individual, person, or subject in the bigger whole: "The task is to think of being acted on and acting as simultaneous, and not only as a sequence" (2015, 6). The spheres of experience, interpretation and practice are interdependent: "Emotions [are] not only influenced by moral judgments but conversely play an active role in producing, altering and even amplifying them" (Blom 2017, 127).

Based on her observations in Egypt's mosque movement and her women protagonists' conscious mobilization of the body-mind interconnection, Saba Mahmood (2005) recognizes agency to unfold in the "multiple ways in which one *inhabits* norms" (15, emphasis in original), stressing people's creative quality of bringing patterns to life by enacting them. Although we make "sense" on the basis of what we already know, and although established epistemologies guide our thoughts and actions, our ever-growing pool of experiences contributes to change. Even individuals thereby penetrate established structures, *and* open up the possibility for deviation, creativity, and modulation. External influences and global entanglements, such as the introduction of mobile phones in Gilgit or the mediatization of love concepts, are appropriated into normative frameworks but also stir up those unstable systems. On the basis of already incorporated

knowledge this offers "potentiality" (Jackson 2008, 381) for (re)assessment and (re)enactment of practices and values as well as emotions.[5]

In her book the *Cultural Politics of Emotion* ([2004] 2014), feminist scholar Sara Ahmed reminds us that "emotion" derives from the Latin word *emovere* (to move or to move out) and shows how emotions are motivational forces that can bind entangled agents together or that, equally, may drive them apart. Ahmed concludes that emotions are created in public and circulate between agents, thereby constituting the very objects who feel them. As feelings are the fuel for the interplay between individual and society, their dyadic character is crucial for one's self-formation as well as forges collective bodies. This political dimension of collective experiences undergoes an intensification in François Laplantine's (2015) work on sensory perception. He foregrounds the tangible aspects of "experiencing together": We literally make sense together in daily activities of eating, suffering, or chatting—a process he calls the "politics of the sensible" (82). Politics here does not mean that every sensory experience is necessarily political, but that there is a political and historical dimension to experience that exceeds the individual's consciousness. Combining both approaches, I aim to describe a "cultural politics of the sensible," alert to both the sensing components in meaning-making and to cultural context. The polysemy of the term "sensible" captures both the phenomenological and epistemological aspects of perception and meaning-making. To be sensible is to be tangible or noticeable, and at the same time reasonable and intelligible. Adding a materialist nuance to the social-constructivist tendency of anthropology, emphasis lies neither on *being* (structure) nor *doing* (agency) but on sensing and embodying one's acts, thus *feeling* as structuring principle. Attuned to the semantics and pragmatics of emotions, I seek to mobilize this link between individual perception and the social collective. As transmitting forces, emotions prompt negotiation and open the possibility for creative action. A cultural politics of the sensible lives up to people's efforts to navigate within the (un)conscious constraints of a multipolar meshwork shaped by historical, ideological, and societal discourses.

In the Area of Gilgit

Gilgit-Baltistan's relationship to Pakistan is a vexed one. Having been part of the former Princely State of Jammu and Kashmir, the region has been a disputed territory between Pakistan and India since the time of Partition in 1947. Although Gilgit-Baltistan, or the Gilgit Agency as it was then called, affiliated itself with Pakistan (Sökefeld 2005), political efforts to become a full part of Pakistan were repeatedly deterred under the official pretext of first needing an overall Kashmir plebiscite involving both sides, India, and Pakistan, which has been impossible to orchestrate since the time a United Nations resolution propagated it in

1948 (Holden 2019). The region has thus remained something of a political frontier (Ali 2019): It does not have constitutional representation in national politics, has never been granted the status of a full province, and is used as strategic leverage in regular conflicts with India. Most skirmishes occur along the *Line of Control* (LoC) much farther to the south of this part of former Kashmir; nevertheless, Gilgit-Baltistan has witnessed immense militarization and increased activities by various Pakistani intelligence agencies (Ali 2019; Sökefeld 2015).

At least on the surface, this quasi-colonial treatment (Sökefeld 2005) has changed since 2009, when legislative reforms, the *Gilgit-Baltistan Empowerment and Self-Governance Order,* recognized local calls for self-determination by giving the people the right to elect their Legislative Assembly, and thus indirectly to choose their chief minister.[6] The region was also formally renamed from "Northern Areas" to Gilgit-Baltistan. The increased capacities allow for more internal autonomy, but the Pakistani government keeps the area in check: The regional government depends on monetary funds from the capital Islamabad and the prime minister has direct jurisdiction over the region's duties, railways, minerals, and strategic roads (Howe and Hunzai 2019). Although a Supreme Court judgment from 1999 describes Gilgit-Baltistan's inhabitants as "citizens of Pakistan for all intents and purposes" (Holden 2019, 5). While they cannot vote in national elections. Nevertheless, the vast majority of them consider Pakistan their country. They hold Pakistani ID cards, and local schools follow Pakistani curriculums.

While the region has long been economically neglected by the Pakistani state, it benefited from the construction of the Karakoram Highway (KKH), which opened in 1986, providing China with a link to Pakistani markets. Although trade across instable terrain that affords a lot of maintenance work holds very little revenue, it serves as symbolic manifestation of the "Pak-China friendship" (Rippa 2020). The KKH also connects Gilgit-Baltistan to the Pakistani centers where some residents travel for work and education. In the high mountains employment opportunities are relatively scarce: There are jobs in trade, local markets, and a small tourism industry along the main roads. Government posts, which come with a stable income and social prestige, are highly sought after, but generally require a good level of education, personal relations with advocates, and in some cases, funds for bribes (Hasan 2014).

Despite such political and economic predicaments, Gilgit-Baltistan's residents have found and spread their voices and their views. Over the last decade, community activists have organized local development projects, as well as written and come together via online news blogs (Stadler 2014; Walter 2014) or expressed their opinions through poetry (Ali 2019). A similar trend is also observed among the growing number of local scholars.[7] Many local activists allege that the Pakistani state simply does not want to give up direct control over the region in view of the construction of the China-Pakistan Economic



FIGURE 3 Topographic map of northern Pakistan. Spohner and Storbeck, University of Bonn, 1998.

Corridor (CPEC) through it. Even though the national government advertises infrastructure construction and energy projects for the region, Gilgit-Baltistan has no say in the decision-making processes as it has no access to the nation's policy-making organs (Howe and Hunzai 2019). Thus, the region remains in a state of "calculated ambiguity" (Ali 2013, 87)—an assessment that still resonates in the project of granting a "provisional" province status and might have additional causes in the region's religious makeup.

Gilgit-Baltistan's society is ethnically, linguistically, and religiously very heterogeneous. Different teachings of Islam have been present in the region since the mid-sixteenth century when Shiite *sayyids* (religious dignitaries and descendants of Prophet Muhammad) arrived from two different directions, from Iran and Kashmir. The Ismaili sect came in the late eighteenth century from central Asian Badakhshan, while Sunni Islam was brought in with the latest wave of missionaries from the south in the early nineteenth century (Rieck 1997). Current inhabitants reflect this settlement pattern: Shia are found in the central districts of Gilgit and Nager and across the eastern districts of Baltistan, in Skardu, Shigar, and Ghanche. The northern and western districts of Hunza and Ghizer are populated by Ismaili, and Sunni dominate the districts of Diamer and Astore to the south. There seems to be less conflict in the Astore valley, where a Shia minority lives among Sunnis, with clashes more commonly occurring in the area in and around the city of Gilgit where the Sunni, Shia, and Ismaili populations are of approximately the same size. There is even more diversity in linguistic groups: Balti, which is related to Tibetan, is spoken in Baltistan. Wakhi connects Upper Hunza to the Pamir regions in Afghanistan and Tajikistan. The endemic language of Burushaski is a common denominator in Hunza and Nager. Khowar is found in the western regions of Ghizer and Yasin. And the people of Gilgit district and further south speak different dialects of Shina, which does not seem to thwart the build-up of sectarian boundaries between Sunni and Shia areas.

Whether or not one includes the Ismaili sect within the Shia branch of Islam, Gilgit-Baltistan is a Shia dominated region—the only one within a predominantly Sunni Pakistan. Despite the area's history of relatively peaceful cohabitation, sectarian tensions have been increasing since the 1970s. After a local uprising threatened the Pakistani military stationed in Gilgit in 1971, radical Sunni *ulema* (religious scholars) started coming into the city as missionaries. The Shias responded by strengthening their ties to Iran and Iraq as well as to Shia madrassas in other parts of Pakistan. Religious scholars exercised considerable influence over the public, particularly since Gilgit-Baltistan lacked its own political institutions. Tensions escalated, leading to shootings in 1975, severe deadly attacks on Shia settlements in 1988, many months of mutual atrocities in 2005, and killings of Shias on the KKH in 2012 (Ali 2019; Rieck 2002; Sökefeld 2015). Even though the Ismaili sect has carefully managed to keep out of the conflict, it feels under threat from extremist Sunni groups that identify Ismaili

as non-Muslims because of their liberal interpretation of the Qur'an and promotion of development programs, which make them especially visible (Steinberg 2011).

Violent outbreaks have left a deep mark on all three communities. Many Gilgit-Baltistanis use a sectarian framework, or what Nosheen Ali calls the "sectarian imaginary" (Ali 2010), to assess and explain any newsworthy incident in the area. Rumors spread quickly and a community that feels slighted may be mobilized to defend their standpoint or avenge a crime. Men are most at risk of being physically attacked, but both real and threatened violence impacts women's environments as well. Curfews that were imposed over many weeks in 2005 and 2012 tied people to their neighborhoods and prevented them from taking roads leading through majority areas of the other sects—making it impossible, for example, for some women to receive obstetric health services (Grieser and Sökefeld 2015; Varley 2010). In recent years, mobile networks have been switched off as a precautionary measure during religious holidays, such as during the public Shiite mourning rituals on Ashura, to prevent coordination and sectarian mobilization.

Today, many locals see the federal government's reluctance to interfere with sectarian violence, along with a politization of Islam on the national level, the establishment of military posts, and severe surveillance by secret agencies, as part of a divide-and-rule strategy to deter regional agendas (Ali 2019). A new generation of local activists and politicians increasingly seek to revive a regional identity that would be able to overcome religious divides. After decades of geopolitical mobilization along religious divides, Sara Smith (2020) describes similar desires for more peaceful relations among Muslim and Buddhist youth in Ladakh. In Gilgit-Baltistan, it has been nearly a decade since the last open, violent conflict. Joint protests by all three sects demanding the restoration of wheat subsidies in 2014 and the election of a Sunni chief minister by a majority Shia population in May 2015 can be interpreted as auspicious first steps.

In line with local efforts not to further "sectarianize" and cement distinctions between the groups, I avoid essentializing religious rifts. I do not deny differences in practices of women's seclusion, religious interpretations, or intersectarian dynamics but want to emphasize regional commonalities. In all three communities, relations between women and men are structured by practices of gender segregation, and lives within the family compound greatly resemble one another; women from all three sects enact and embody modesty, albeit to varying degrees. Moreover, all Gilgitis have been affected by the growing influence of transnational media and increased educational opportunities. Since a person cannot be reduced to only one aspect of her personality, sometimes differences are greater between individuals from the same community than between sects. So while I stay attuned to sectarian difference, I consider it as one of many factors in women's lives and loves, which also involve differences of gender, ethnic and

linguistic identities, education, exposure to other mindsets, age and economic circumstance.

My conversations with Gilgiti women reinforced that approach. Because I interacted with families from all three sects, my friends often questioned me about the food, housework, and customs of other sects, seeking a kind of cultural exchange that their own lives do not permit. Most of what I could offer, though, merely reinforced their similarities, prompting many older women, who interacted with other sects more directly in their childhood, when intermarriages were more common and neighborhoods not yet segregated along sectarian lines, to nod their heads in agreement. They frequently remarked that they all have common roots, following with statements like: "Yes, sure. They're also from here (*Vo bhī yahān ke hain*)!" Such a view pivots from seeing cultural aspects as the product of a narrow understanding of Islam to claiming a wider, shared, socio-historic and ethnic framework with familiar lifestyles and epistemologies.[8]

These shared roots, however, provide another mechanism of social distinction: the "quasi-kinship" groups (Sökefeld 1998, 103) of *qōm,* which have historically been termed the caste system. Indirectly signifying different occupations, socioeconomic differences perpetuate through landownership and long-standing professional specialization (Dumont, [1966] 2000). The district of Gilgit is dominated by three ethnic groups, Shin, Yeshkun, and Dom, ordered in a hierarchical fashion: The Shin, pastoralists affiliated with the mythological purity of mountain summits, take the top position; the land-owning Yeshkun do fairly well in the middle; and the Dom, who perform services like blacksmithing and playing music, jobs associated with dirt and mundane desires, find themselves at the bottom. According to stereotype, they do not care about their reputation and wear eccentric, garish clothing and noticeable makeup. Outside these three groups, there are a few smaller communities, including those of prestigious former ruling families, religious dignitaries (*sayyids*), and those who have moved to Gilgit from valleys all over the surrounding mountain range, starting with the Kashmiris in the nineteenth century (Biddulph [1880] 1971; Drew 1875; Jettmar 1975).

Yet when I asked young women in both urban and rural settings about their *qōm,* most did not know to which group they belonged. They mostly interact within the network of their relatives, their *ghar vale* (immediate family that shares the same house) or their *khāndān* (extended family). The divisions are fading, or perhaps they have never been as distinct as was suggested in colonial records (Sökefeld 1994). Additionally, other ways of marking difference are becoming more important, such as the level of education. In schools, colleges, and universities girls are more likely to be confronted with differences along lines of sect or language, than of traditional lineage hierarchies. And the largest difference of all remains gender.

Love in South Asia

Much has been said and written about gender segregation in South Asia and Muslim women's practice of veiling (cf. Jeffery 1979; Papanek and Minault 1982; Mandelbaum 1988; Kirmani 2013). Such scholarship often engages with issues in semi-public spheres. In Gilgit-Baltistan, for example, case studies have focused on inequity in mobility, health, or education (Besio 2006; Benz 2014; Göhlen 1998; Halvorson 2011; Hewitt 1989; Varley 2010, 2012b). Only Maria Marhoffer-Wolff (2002), in her monograph on female mediums in Yasin Valley, and Katrin Gratz (2006), in her richly detailed ethnographic book on women's lives in Gilgit, dedicated their work to local women's biographies, personal views, and emotions in more depth. It is striking that research on gender relations itself mirrors a strong gender bias. All the ethnographies on Gilgiti—and on Pakistani women—that I have come across were written by women anthropologists. Male researchers have restricted access to women's circles and tend to focus on more "prestigious" projects concerning politics, economics, infrastructure, or geography, which do not demand the same degree of personal involvement. In so doing they implicitly reproduce underlying rules of gender segregation that distinguish the masculine public sphere from "soft" feminine topics, such as family and emotions.[9]

Prompted by Foucault's *History of Sexuality* ([1976] 1978), sociologists (Bauman 2003; Giddens 1992; Luhmann [1986] 1982) and historians (Reddy 2001, 2012; Simmons 2009), have shifted their attention to the emotion of love in the last decades and described developments from social regulations to personal choice.[10] Similarly, the feminist historian Christina Simmons (1979) delineates developments in Euro-American history that changed from more utilitarian motives into what she calls "companionate marriage." The term describes relationships "based on friendship and sexual satisfaction" (54) that became more common in the 1920s in the wake of a first feminist sexual revolution to cast down patriarchal domination and restrictive Victorian values. These historical analyses can be useful, but they highly generalize social processes of Western countries and cannot represent the heterogeneous and multilayered contexts of other places in the world. Collected contributions on love in miscellaneous cultural settings do greater justice to the diversity of existing love concepts (de Munck, 1998).

Nonetheless, in a cross-cultural comparison, Jennifer Hirsch and Holly Wardlow (2006) observe a global trend toward companionate marriage in the past decades. In the introduction to their edited volume *Modern Loves,* they summarize that conjugal companionship increasingly involves emotional closeness and is seen as more important than other relationships, as evidenced by many different forms: "marriage based on a prior romantic relationship, individual choice in spouse, monogamy (as opposed to polygamy), sexual fidelity within marriage, nuclear family households, neolocal residence, the idealization of verbal over instrumental expressions of attachment (e.g., saying "I love you" rather

than washing his clothes or fixing her car), preferring the company of one's spouse over familial or same-sex sociality, viewing marital sex as an expression and symbol of emotional attachment (Hirsch and Wardlow 2006, 5)." The term "companionate marriage" also frequently appears in works on new developments of marriage in South Asia that, depending on cultural and socio-economic context, stress one or the other criteria.

Following the same logic, Charles Lindholm (2006) identifies romantic love as counterforce to a highly individualistic and rather hostile socio-economic environment: the couple as safe haven, while in socially more integrated scenarios romance and sexuality often belong to separate spheres. Such interpretations come with an implicit evolutionary baggage that anthropologist usually work to deconstruct. All accounts in Owen Lynch's *Divine Passions* (1990), for example, draw on ethnographic fieldwork to enrich our understanding of emotions in their local context. Moreover, Lynch takes explicit aim at the Western belief in emotions' interiority and at scholars who doubt the veracity of their interlocutors' emotions. Until recently, many functionalist and materialist explanations try to unmask love instead of accepting the sincerity of emotions or emotional pluralism.[11]

In search of feelings' authenticity, interdisciplinary research groups—like that of Birgitt Röttger-Rössler, who brought together anthropologists, psychologists, and neurobiologists—have worked on biocultural approaches of love (Fisher 2004; Röttger-Rössler and Engelen 2006) and emotions (Röttger-Rössler and Markowitsch 2009). They, for example, analyzed perceptible physiological states of love, such as a fast-beating heart, trembling, or breaking into sweat, as well as love's affective dispositions, which are the cultural context for such biological responses. While concepts of love vary depending on cultural, social, and individual factors, the human body's capacity to feel lust, attraction, or attachment exist, though their manifestations differ. The most valuable contribution of biocultural approaches, however, is to draw the attention to emotion's universal existence.

Similarly, William Jankowiak (1995) stimulates the anthropological debate with his interrogatively titled edited volume, *Romantic Passion: A Universal Experience?* The book targets the previously widely held assumption that love and courtship are merely Euro-American products. Missionaries, and later on also ethnographers and psychologists, stereotyped the "lusty savage" (7) as a countercaricature to prudishly restricted Victorian sexuality; this Orientalist bias gave rise to the conception of non-Western people's emphasis on sexual desire over sensitive love. Additionally, people in other parts of the world are often depicted as depending more heavily on social networks that regulate their feelings through normative determination. They are stigmatized as emotionally one-dimensional and denied the capacity to experience complex emotions such as romance.

The social sciences' tendency to "Other" and Orientalize also reflects in the way social sciences have long reduced marriage and kinship in South Asia to functional implications and structural patterns (Dumont [1957] 1983; Eglar 1960), such as economic transactions surrounding marriage relations (cf. Tambiah 1973; Tapper 1991):

> Marriage must be within the group that seeks to reproduce itself in terms of status and control over property. It then becomes an alliance between two families and kin groups involving a series of material transactions and counter-transaction, with emotions being subordinated to wider "utilitarian" considerations. This makes reproduction or marriage a social rather than an individual act. Desire, choice, and love are thus separated from the institution of marriage, which is about social reproduction and not about individual needs and their fulfillment. The dominant morality does not expect emotional and erotic satisfaction in marriage and regards love and sexuality with distrust and suspicion. (Chowdhry 2007, 2)

Based on his research in Haryana, northern India, which has a long joint cultural history with the Pakistani Punjab, Prem Chowdhry (2007) understands marriage as a social institution that reproduces the socio-economic status quo, completely decoupled from emotions of love. In an ethnography on the northern Pakistani Punjab, Hastings Donnan (1988) breaks with this reductive tradition, demonstrating that models of prescriptive marriage systems do not explain the actual practices of individuals. Subsequently, Patricia and Roger Jeffery's (1996) book *Don't Marry Me to a Plowman!*, about marriage practices in rural North India, shifted the focus further to the empirical level, in their case, of their women protagonists. I follow a similar trajectory.

Most pages of this book are inhabited by "girls"; in contrast to a "woman" with legal rights, a girl is assumed to be immature and dependent on her family for protection (Jamal 2006; Khoja-Moolji 2018). When a girl gets married, she qualifies as a woman, moves to her husband's house, assumes new domestic responsibilities, and soon undertakes childcare. This book's protagonists, though they might be young, are strong characters, not to be belittled. Moreover, feminine and masculine spheres of influence intersect at home, where gender relations are less dichotomous and more entangled. Although very few studies dig into couples' relationships, especially the emotional aspects to which a "marital ethnography" (Inhorn 2012, 12) should be attuned, men are an integral part of women's lives, not only as authorities vested with patriarchal or Islamic masculinity, but also as friends, lovers, and husbands. I make sure they can share their sides of the story.

Over the last two decades, various authors (Ahearn 2001; Bhandari 2020; Donner 2016; Grover 2011; Maqsood 2021; Mody 2008; Robinson 2014; Twamley 2014) have shown that newer versions of marriage in South Asia include a certain

level of personal involvement and consent to guidance from family by both young women and men: The choice of partner is actively negotiated between children and parents, while economic, caste, or religious considerations also play a role. Ravinder Kaur and Rajini Palriwala's edited volume, *Marrying in South Asia* (2014), provides a good overview of recent debates that focus considerably on the emerging middle classes throughout the continent, which are concerned with upward mobility, new modes of matchmaking, such as internet platforms, and the reorganization of the family life of working women. While social and ethical constraints accompany every decision one takes, emotions link personal feelings with moral evaluation, and thus allow for insights into mechanisms of interaction between individual and community. In accordance with the political dimension of the sensible, love—anywhere in the world—should not be mistaken as solely an individual's feeling but must be analyzed in relation to social environment, material circumstances, religion, and media. I will elaborate on all these factors to make an argument about young women's mobilization of "love" to increase their radius of influence in the family, with their in-laws, and with their husbands to liberate themselves from paternalist stereotypes of oppression. Such a democratization of marriages in Gilgit resonates with developments in other parts of South Asia, as well as in the wider Muslim world.

Many studies in Muslim countries from Northern Africa to the Middle East and from Afghanistan to Indonesia have focused on the threat of flirtatious premarital romances, often mediated through new technologies, to systems of arranged marriage (Billaud 2015; Costa 2016; Menin 2018; Pearl Kaya 2009; Schielke 2015; Smith-Hefner 2019). Because social rules of gender segregation and the taboo of physical intimacy outside of marriage are strong, especially in times of a global Islamic revivalism, women struggle for self-determination in the search for a partner. They have to juggle their desire for love with an increasingly restrictive Islamic morality that disapproves of contact between strangers of the opposite sex. As one scholar puts it: "There is no dating in Islam" (Smith-Hefner 2019, 169). In Gilgit-Baltistan, though, the case for Shia women is slightly different. They manage to ease the tension between modernity and modesty through the religious—and increasingly also social—recognition of their marital status even before its proper implementation.

Shalini Grover (2011) makes the case that, in India, the binary of love and arranged marriages is not only currently dissolving through hybrid forms but has never actually existed as fully as people assume. In an ethnography on Delhi's poor, she shows that their marriage decisions are influenced by tales of love and romance, as well as by financial considerations. Reducing arranged marriages to a matter of force, making that their essential characteristic, therefore mirrors and overstates Euro-American values of a spontaneous, independent "natural chemistry." Or, as Katherine Twamley (2014) writes in her study on contemporary Gujarati marriage arrangements: "Choosing to fall in love [with one's



FIGURE 4 Women on a leisure trip to see the view over Gilgit.
Photo by the author.

spouse] does not negate the emotion." (104) Instead of drawing awkward, unbalanced comparisons, passing prejudiced judgment, or arrogantly endeavoring to uncover the "truth" below a public "performance," we need to understand love concepts on their own terms, within the local epistemology. In her beautiful ethnography *Notes on Love in a Tamil Family* (1992), Margaret Trawick admits her own bias against her protagonists' feelings: "I found myself thinking, time after time, 'But *this* isn't love.' Now, after years, I can answer myself with detached amusement, 'Of course it isn't love, it's *anpu*'" (92). Her statement gets at the core problem of research on emotions, especially one so morally charged as love: the difficulties of access and ambiguity. Since individuals are sometimes at loss about their own feelings, how can an anthropologist confidently claim to know them? I faced precisely this dilemma in my fieldwork in and around Gilgit and worked carefully to attune myself empathically to my interlocutors.

Empathic Attunement

The narratives and experiences presented in *Intimate Connections* center to a large extent on local women's embodiment and negotiation of emotions. Data collection took place between 2011 and 2015 during a total of fourteen months of fieldwork, when I lived with four different families and visited their relatives' houses in various locations of Gilgit District. Thanks to new communication

technologies like WhatsApp and Facebook, I have been able to stay connected—albeit in different ways—with key interlocutors, observing new developments in their lives and conferring with them about my own understandings. To protect my interlocutors' anonymity, given the sensitive topics they discussed with me, I do not want to spell out their exact places of residence.[12] But I can provide a general sense of each family's sect and setting: One family lived in an old, Shia-majority neighborhood in Gilgit city; an Ismaili family lived in a mixed Sunni and Ismaili inner-city *moḥalla*; another Shia family lived in the suburb of Danyore; and a fourth, in a Shia valley on the outskirts of Gilgit. I also spent time with an urban Sunni family who lived in the neighborhood where my research assistant, a university-educated anthropologist, had grown up. When I elaborate specific examples, however, I tend not to locate them, and instead present my research as taking place in a wide geographic field. Terms such as "in the area of Gilgit" or "Gilgiti women" therefore not only stand for the inner-city of Gilgit but unite my interlocutors throughout the district. This makes sense on an empirical level, too: People in the area are highly mobile, traveling to and from rural valleys, suburbs, and the urban center of Gilgit to see family, seek work, and pursue education. Moreover, their experiences of gender and emotions are shaped by exposure to transnational media content, such as Indian films and TV dramas, as well as travel to Pakistan's metropolises of Islamabad, Lahore, or Karachi. As Smith observes: "Mobility adds to and complicates what is required for the defense of territory through intimate geopolitics. Influences multiply and movement itself disperses groundedness and reveals new horizons both opening and foreclosing" (2020, 135). These new experiences are at least as important as older socio-economic, geographic, or religious differences.

While the relative absence of women in public felt quite hostile to me in the beginning of my fieldwork, an intense involvement in my interlocutors' daily lives at home quickly mended that impression. I started out my research with a question on gendered mobile phone use, but soon found myself constantly involved in conversations about the bigger theme of love. It began as I heard loud lamentations about young women's potential "misuse" of cell phones in enabling premarital affairs. Listening to women's extensive personal reflections and witnessing them through rites of passage connected to marriage, from flirtations, proposals, engagements, dating phases, weddings, sexual experiences, and childbirth, to heartbreak and divorce, I came to understand that the ongoing changes were not so much about technology as they were about love.

Being a woman in a gender-segregated environment, I realized that the fieldwork bore a strongly gendered lens. As I was in my mid-twenties, married but without my husband around and childless, I was ascribed the role of a "daughter" or "sister" in the liminal phase between *nikāḥ* and *shādī*, a time that is dominated by conversations about "boys," love, and sexuality. I was readily taken into confidence by my fellow "sisters," most of whom were between fifteen and

twenty-five years of age, and eager to discuss their expectations of married life. But I was also privy to conversations with older women who might not have spoken so bluntly about personal male-female relations to a girl they would perceive as wholly inexperienced in conjugal intimacies. I became close with some women in their thirties and had good relationships with a few women in the parent generation, in their late fifties. Because relatives spend a lot of open and relaxed time in women's circles together at home, I also got to witness plenty of intergenerational debates and conversations.

While I conducted eighty-six qualitative interviews—sixty with women, twenty-six with men—only those with long-term acquaintances proved to be of substantive content. Others stayed on a rather generic level. Consequently, most of my data on emotions, women's modesty, male-female interactions, and changing ideas of love was gathered through participant observation in daily life and conversations with women over their daily tasks. Because feelings and emotions are often difficult to detect and must manifest themselves in behavior or words for others to grasp them, the biggest problem for cross-cultural work is that emotions are often framed differently and therefore not easily perceptible by the researcher. Emotionally charged, highly subjective ideas about love or decency often lie beyond words, not because they necessarily are taboo to talk about, but because they are difficult to articulate in linguistic terms—though this itself might to some extent reflect a certain level of taboo. If a feeling is not articulated in emotional terms, it does not mean that it does not occur. Moreover, the researcher cannot simply rely on terminology or autobiographical interviews because language is often heavily reliant on idioms that frame feelings through a cultural prism (Beatty 2013). During my fieldwork, I hardly ever heard the Urdu or Shina words for emotions (*jazbāt*) or feeling (*eḥsās* or *meḥsūs*); shame or modesty is enacted as etiquette, while lovesickness is framed as a state of madness. Moreover, Amélie Blom (2017) made the important observation that the epistemological distinction between feelings as sensory experience and emotions as conscious reflective process is not paralleled in Urdu; in Pakistan "nuance lies more in degrees of intensity" (126): *jazbāt* standing for an excess of *eḥsās* that is hard to control.

Warning not to overemphasize literary works in the analysis of emotions in South Asia, Margrit Pernau (2016, 2019), an expert on the history of emotions of North Indian Muslims in the colonial period, argues for a multi-modal approach (with Rajamani 2016): semantic categories can also be found in the subcontinent's oral tradition of sermons, speeches, songs, recited poems, folktales, and other forms of media representations. Moreover, tactile signs and bodily expressions indicate how people make sense through previous experiences and how these impressions have transformed body and mind. As emotions are not one-dimensional data that can be retrieved, but inconsistent and supple, ethnographers need to grasp such nuances through an additional mode of

communication that is created in the intersubjective engagement and shared experience of researcher and interlocutors. In participant observation, anthropologists—often unconsciously—utilize a form of "empathic embodiment" or "empathic attunement" to grasp ineffable concepts (Walter 2019). We are influenced by our material surrounding, "sense" the social setting, adapt to daily life, practice different movements, are affected by others' actions and emotions, and "feel" our field. We use what Thomas Csordas calls "somatic modes of attention" (1993), taking "the "lived body" as a methodological starting point," a way of noticing our own physical experiences and how others relate to their environment through the body rather than treating the body as "an object of study" (ibid. 136) or an impediment to overcome. Such kinesthetic mimesis (Jackson 1989) can be difficult to achieve for emotional states, but psychological studies have shown that emotions are generated by empathic expression: When someone is sad, we mirror her sadness with similar facial expressions and bodily postures and through this adjustment also become sad. Thus, the "imitation of facial expression facilitates its recognition" (Niedenthal et al. 2005, 32).

Empathic fieldwork depends on the researcher's willingness to acquire "fresh layers of orientation" (Ram 2015, 39) by exposing herself to other ways of life, engaging with normative behavior, and letting herself be *impressed*. As Beatty summarizes: "Deep immersion entails a resocializing of the body—an embodied grasp of cultural codes—as well as a recognition of diverse intersubjectivities (shared emotions, porous personhood) and the distinctive scenarios defining locally construed emotions." (2019, 263) For me, this meant taking up a passive feminine role in public,[13] as well as sharing very private details in women's circles. I strove to be attentive, imitated my hosts' behavior, and gradually fine-tuned my actions and perceptions. Although I mainly spoke Pakistan's lingua franca, Urdu, with my interlocutors and only managed to acquire some very basic skills in local Shina, it turned out to be an advantage: Because Urdu is a second language for them as well as for me, we met on something closer to equal ground. The prestige that is generally ascribed to a foreign visitor was mitigated by my clumsy attempts at Shina and my flawed Urdu, which put women who are otherwise often overlooked into the positions of expert teachers.

And they were proud of what they taught me. "Who's the girl with you?" one of my Gilgiti friends' neighbors once asked. "Oh, she's one of Rubina's relatives from the village," came the reply. I sat at the back of a group of women as curious eyes turned toward me, and parents of young men of marriageable age assessed my exemplary shy posture. I fastened the veil even tighter around my face and kept my head tilted down. "Yeah, yeah," one of my friends continued, when no one recognized me, explaining that I was "from the very last village in the valley." When I tried to answer a direct question in a local Shina dialect, my friends burst out laughing and confessed their joke. Astonishment followed: "No, that's unbelievable. She looks even more *shermātī* (shy, modest) than our girls."

Such performances and corporeal experiences brought shared pleasure, but they also helped me understand my interlocutors' daily physical and emotional lives. For example, out of respect, women and minors never stretch out their legs in the presence of male elders. Whenever the head of the household or other men were present at home and sat in the same room with me, I kept my legs folded, which occasionally resulted in bad knee pains, an ailment that older women frequently suffer from—patriarchy made physically tangible. The continuous performance of modest behavior affected my own sense of decency, so I unconsciously aligned further behavior accordingly and was able to intuitively comprehend cultural meanings. This worked well for interactions with women but proved to be a balancing act with men, as gender norms demand not only physical but also emotional distance.

While I could quite freely interact with men from the families I was staying with and was able to conduct some in-depth interviews, the number and range of men accessible to me was limited if I did not want to put either my hosts' or my own reputation in any danger. Nevertheless, I experienced a high degree of openness and sincerity in my conversations with these male "relatives." Many were quite conscious of advantages and limitations of shifting power relations between couples and within families. Younger men seemed to welcome the opportunity to speak to a woman quite freely. I was repeatedly surprised at their ability to share both emotionally and sexually intimate stories with me without slipping into dodgy terrain, particularly since foreign women are stereotyped as flirtatious or willing to engage in illicit acts. Talking openly about my own marriage and displaying my wedding pictures helped clarify my unavailability. However, when one old acquaintance made unmistakable advances, I experienced first-hand how vulnerable women—even the foreign anthropologist (Schild 2021)—in the face of patriarchal power relations actually are. I searched for the mistake I assumed I must have made to encourage his behavior. And in order to avoid hurt feelings and maintain relations of mutual trust and peace in the extended family, I could not turn to anyone. All I could do was hope that my defenses would be sufficient to keep me safe from further transgressions.

While empathic attunement has real advantages for anthropological insight, emotions are still highly contextual and strongly connected to biographical aspects. They may always stay partly ambiguous to an outsider. The criticism most commonly applied to research on emotions reflects the values of scientific objectivity, framing empathy as "projections of one's own ideological assumptions" (Lynch 1990, 11). However, anthropologists have known for decades that their research is always subjective. One can only ever approximate what another feels by taking her perspective. Empathy does not mean to accept first impressions as true but to enter a collaborative project of reflexivity. To overcome the problem of emotions' inconsistency, Beatty (2013) suggests we analyze them

through a person's historicity, reminding us that "life is a movie, not a snapshot" (2014, 557). In other words, people may be reacting not only to their immediate context, but to older conflicts, feelings, or events. Rather than confidently assuming I understand my interlocutors' feelings, then, I seek out the narratives with which they make sense of their own experiences and share this information with the reader through in-depth biographical vignettes. The conventions of academic writings cannot always do justice to such accounts. Switching between vernacular perceptions and perspectives, my own analysis, and insights from other scholars, I use a kind of polyvocality that matches the polyphonic character of emotions themselves.[14]

Experience-based approaches have been criticized on the grounds that their "radical subjectivity" romanticizes instead of deconstructs structural inequalities. But as Sara Suleri (1992, 764) argues, they actually establish alternatives to the mainstream discourse of "patriarchal rationalism," centering individual experience in a way that facilitates the dissection of power and agency in the cause of local women. Since social scientists or journalists often prioritize interviews and written sources, the influential texts of public figures and self-proclaimed advocates are frequently over-represented, while the voices of whole strata of society go missing. Pakistan-born sociologist Shanaz Rouse scrutinizes this tendency: "By looking only at 'public' women (those active in feminist politics, the professions, etc.), we privilege a certain speech, we too engage in 'veiling' and silencing" (2006, 43). When we pay heed to the lives of other women, we begin to see how people negotiate and construct important cultural and political concepts in their everyday lives. For many of my friends and interlocutors in Gilgit, an interested foreigner opened a window for a socially acceptable tightrope walk, so they could both obey local rules of respectability and become visible to the outside world.

The Feminist Project

Besides describing intimacy as an emotional link between people, love in my analysis helps us understand wider changes in female empowerment, Islamic revivalism, and the appropriation of transnational media trends in local frameworks. And, I argue, new forms of love are part of how women in Gilgit-Baltistan lobby—however privately—for parity and self-determination. While most women do not question gender roles at a general level, their changing understandings of conjugal love slowly renegotiates the rule of elders, especially the father as symbolic head of the kinship system. Such struggles against patriarchy have been of great interest to both scholars and laypeople, but too often writers explore issues surrounding "*the* Muslim woman" with a reliance on a negatively tinged, neo-Orientalist dichotomy of the liberal West versus repressive Islam.

As the Islamic faith spreads across the world, its adherents vary greatly according to regional culture, ethnicity, history, class, age, and education, and their interpretations of the Qur'an and other religious texts vary too. The common presentation of Muslim women as a unified and homogenous group combines with an overemphasis on *parda*-related practices to perpetuate the assumption that Islam is the dominant factor in women's lives. Because many Muslim women elude the "Western gaze" (Kirmani 2013, 8) through gender segregation and veiling, they raise ambiguous feelings of insecurity, concern, and pity for an oppressed group in need of liberation. As Lila Abu-Lughod points out, journalists, activists, developmentalists, and researchers often implicitly reduce "other women, and particularly Muslim women, to subjects known only by deficits in their rights, with the remedies" of development, empowerment, and humanitarianism (2013, 223).[15]

Small-scale but in-depth studies like my own help decenter "*the* Muslim woman," not to negate the importance of religion but to show how diverse and flexible identities are continuously forming. This book therefore seeks to plead the case for "ordinary" Muslim women by respectfully acknowledging their productive involvement in and successful renegotiation of gender norms. As this book's close descriptions of Gilgiti lives demonstrate, individuals are shaped by their surroundings in complex ways even as they take an active part in the social construction of gendered roles, attitudes, feelings, and opinions. Some of my contacts in the field productively rejected an outsider gaze of supremacy and pity, turned it around, and spoke out against what they saw as socially or religiously impoverished ways of life. For as rural and isolated as some of the valleys may seem, people in Gilgit-Baltistan do not live in ignorance about the outside world. After a long conversation about her marriage, for example, a woman in her mid-twenties assessed her life trajectory in comparison to what she correctly assumed to be mine: "Oh, you poor women, you have to have a career, manage a household, please a husband, and go everywhere alone. I used to put much effort in my beauty, now it's enough to be a mother." The "poor women," it seems, are always the others—the others who are enslaved by social expectations with which one does not identify. The woman who pitied me had realized what many people can hardly imagine: that people all over the world find themselves involved in socio-cultural webs that demand subordination, or at least coordination. Ideas and ideologies, including values of personal independence, are not created in a vacuum.

Emotionally charged discourses about the degeneration of morals are part of a wider South Asian episteme that casts (Muslim) women as guardians of the social order. In a detailed investigation of women's role in Pakistan's political discourse, Shanaz Rouse (2006) shows how since the nineteenth century Muslim women have been called on to be responsible for the "construction, maintenance and preservation" (6) of their communities. When, after partition from India in

1947, the newly founded country of Pakistan relied on an Islamic rhetoric as a unifying force for its multi-ethnic inhabitants, piety became a matter of national ideology. The outspoken founder and leader of the Jamaat-e-Islami missionary network and political party, Maulana Maududi, has advocated for the symbolic control of women, which he associated with patriotism and a stronghold against outside interference. In this geopolitical view, women embody markers of difference to morally set oneself apart from neighboring communities, as well as from (post)colonial powers (cf. Smith 2020). Nevertheless, liberal elites have always tried to organize the new nation-state on more secular principles. But many of their reforms were either transformed later or never thoroughly implemented by authorities or the wider population to begin with. Although Muslim reformist movements in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries propagated formal training for men and religious education for both genders, they prepared women only for their domestic duties. So, both publicly and privately, women's roles have been characterized by a tension between the conflicting role as citizens of Pakistan with equal human rights and the expectation that, as obedient Muslim daughters or wives, they must protect both themselves and society as a whole from moral chaos (Jamal 2006). These powerful dynamics of representation play out in women's self-perception as proud family members, proud Muslims, proud Shia, proud Pakistanis, or proud Gilgit-Baltistanis.

While most Pakistani laws do not formally curtail women's rights, their patriarchal implementation has rendered women more vulnerable. Such is the case with the *Muslim Family Laws Ordinance* (MFLO) from 1956 (ratified in 1961), which requires all marriages be registered, and for a ninety-day reconciliation period to be observed before a divorce becomes effective. Local customs, as well as government officials, however, draw on Islamic interpretations to argue against bureaucratization of private matters, or only hold women responsible for waiting three months after a separation, effectively to discern if they are with child, while men can move on quickly. Patriarchal control over women was further institutionalized by the military dictator Zia-ul-Haq (1977–1988). His agenda of Islamization favored the religious-right ideology of the Jamaat-e-Islami that advocates *shariat* (Islamic law) (Toor 2014). Their Deobandi position was reflected in the *Hudood Ordinances* from 1979, which included a section on *zinā (*sexual intercourse outside of marriage). The act takes precedence from the *hadith* (records of the Prophet's words and actions), which states that extramarital sex is to be punished either with flogging for fornication (when the perpetrators are unmarried), or death by stoning for adultery (when they are married, but not to each other).[16] Even though the death penalty was never carried out, adultery was severely punished with imprisonment, and especially women sometimes awaited their trials for months or years in jail (Khan 2006). Because Islamic law demands four male witnesses to prove an act of *zinā,* most reported cases could not be prosecuted; a woman's testimony of rape or an ensuing

pregnancy, however, was treated as a confession and proof that she was guilty of *zinā*. The law therefore effectively targeted women and allowed men, such as police officers, to exploit the uneven prosecution of rape (Quraishi 1997; Suleri 1992). Although Zia-ul-Haq's regime has ended, the religious right wing retains powerful political influence, and Pakistan's legislation has continued to borrow from the *shariat*. One instrument to counterbalance liberal reforms is the *Council for Islamic Ideology, which* appraises new bills for their congruency with Islam. Since its foundation in 1962 it has not possessed any judicial powers but it regularly creates media stirs, such as in 2014 when it condemned bills against child marriage as un-Islamic, arguing that puberty was the decisive factor for maturity.

But the abusiveness of the *Hudood Ordinances* has also given rise to a strong mobilization of women in Pakistan. Founded in 1981, the *Women's Action Forum* (WAF) argued against Zia's Islamization politics from a secular position. They managed to attract civil society's support in the beginning but government and religious representatives successfully portrayed them as an upper-class movement, influenced by outside forces. While the masculine state apparatus has a history of casting Pakistan's women movements in such light (Charania 2014; Khan 2018),[17] their accusation "conveniently overlooks foreign funding for religious groups" (Shaheed 2010, 863).[18] Society's actual ideological struggle lies in the divide between a secular elite and a religiously orthodox middle class that sees itself as a moral stronghold in opposition to Western values of individualism and sexual freedom (Jamal 2006). Campaigns for legal abortion, female-initiated divorce (*khulā*), or protection from honor killings are quickly dismissed as postcolonial impositions of external ideas that would result in family disintegration, pornography, and violence (Abu Odeh 1993)—all exaggeratedly ascribed to feminism's "anti-men, anti-family, anti-religion" agenda (Ahmed-Ghosh 2008, 102). Pressure on the Pakistani state by the United Nations (and other donor agencies) to implement human rights and programs for women's empowerment add fuel to these allegations.

Countering attacks from within their society, many female activists in Pakistan, as in other Muslim countries, have changed their strategy and now apply alternative interpretations of religious texts. They, for example, claim that the Qur'an represented a progressive momentum in the seventh century.[19] Others point out how strong and self-determined Prophet Muhammad's own wives and daughters were, especially the economically independent Khadija and the politically engaged Aisha (Ahmed-Ghosh 2008). Since the late 1980s, Islamic feminists have propagated women's liberation within an Islamic framework. Instead of being able to publicly announce inequalities, these women activists acknowledge that established laws are well-meant and only poorly executed or adapted (Charania 2014). The sociologist and feminist activist Farida Shaheed (1986), for example, argues that Islamic laws would often empower women, such as give them the right to inherit, but cultural mechanisms are used to excuse people

from these rules and, respectively, to declare that inheritance is reflected in the dowry.

Islamic feminists mostly do not critically engage with the masculinity of religious interpretation or challenge patriarchal verses that clearly place men above women. Although many argue for women's equality, they acknowledge the difference of gender roles and affirm the Qur'anic message of women's "complementarity" to men. By shifting debates about female empowerment in their families from a focus on the struggle for equality to the "correct" observance of Islam, feminists even contribute to Islam's increasingly central position in Pakistan (Abu Odeh 1993). Moreover, by employing Islamic logics for a feminist cause, activists recognize religious authorities; their version of often orthodox Islamic discourse penetrates local society and is normalized. This way feminist activists themselves promote a uniform version of Islam, based on textual interpretations, that flattens women's diverse experiences and lifestyles, and implies that Muslim women's lives are best governed by Islamic principles, thus sidelining secular voices (Kirmani and Philips 2011).

At the same time, Islamic revivalism also disrupts "the Eurocentric conflation of Muslim, Islamism, and fundamentalism" (Jamal 2012, 71). Based on her observations of Jamaat-e-Islami's women's wing, Amina Jamal (2012), argues that there is no clear divide between secular and Islamic feminists in Pakistan because both groups have to position themselves against the state's and other women's Muslim identity. While Islamic movements embrace democratic principles, progressives draw on a rich religious history of liberal rights and tolerance. Neither group can therefore be characterized as purely Islamic or purely secular; instead, like the majority of women whom they want to reach and speak for, these activists tend to be moderate Muslims. That was certainly true of the *Alliance Against Sexual Harassment* (AASHA) in the 2000s, an effective, volunteer-based initiative led by the famous activist Fouzia Saeed. Because they did not resort to radical confrontation or opposition and included both Islamic and secular developmental arguments in their lobbying, they gradually contributed to a change of sentiments within the wider society, as well as among politicians (Ahmad 2012). After Pakistani director Sharmeen Obaid's 2016 Oscar-winning documentary, *A Girl in the River: The Price of Forgiveness*, about an attempted honor killing and the public outcry over the murder of social media celebrity Qandeel Baluch in the name of honor by her brother in the same year, the legislative assembly passed the *Anti-Honor-Killing Laws* and *Anti-Rape Laws* in early October 2016. These acts transfer honor killings to the criminal penal code, carrying a life sentence for the culprit without any chance of pardon, and permit DNA evidence in rape cases, thereby overcoming the *zinā* laws that demanded four male witnesses. How numbers changed after the introduction of these laws and how they are in fact enforced requires further investigation.

Despite success stories, scholars and activists regularly lament the decline of feminist mobilizations in South Asia and take a pessimistic view of the seemingly apolitical, consumerist stance of younger, especially middle-class, women. In much recent work, gender studies scholars and social scientists have come to the conclusion that government initiatives, NGOs, and international development organizations have taken over women issues and appropriated feminist vocabularies over the last decades. Replacing more radical women organizations, international donor agencies have shifted the responsibility for improvement to the individual instead of criticizing wider structural inequalities (Loomba and Lukose 2012; Roy 2012).[20] This professionalization of "women's empowerment" features the neoliberal agenda of "girling the development" (Khoja-Moolji 2018, 99), which posits successful collaborators against girls who do not acquire much education, marry early, or have to work to support their families. They thereby overlook structural forces and discount alternative agency.

By positioning women as key to save not only themselves but their communities, the strategies of the international development community and nationalist religious scholars exhibit strong parallels, as Shenila Khoja-Moolji identifies in her book *Forging the Ideal Educated Girl* (2018). The patronizing agenda of "gifting" education to Muslim women to empower them can be a kind of subjugating, postcolonial supremacy that ignores other ways Muslim women yield influence. Malala Yousafzai's famous struggle to acquire education against all odds, and men's violent attempts to silence her voice in public, for example, are readily received by Euro-American audiences but often disowned in Pakistan. As Khoja-Moolji summarizes, "Malala's transnational uptake, then, sustains assumptions that transform all Pakistani, Muslim men into terrorists, and all Muslim women into victims or potential victims" (121). Malala's story draws many Muslim girls' quality of life into question, denying the possibility of empowerment in their own right, or via other values.

While there are only very few international organizations active in Gilgit these days, the executive, as well as normative, influence of the *Aga Khan Development Network* (AKDN) is immense. Besides a long history of education programs for both girls and boys, the AKDN has also been carrying out the *Aga Khan Rural Support Program* (AKRSP), since 1982, which runs self-sustaining capacity-building schemes through (male) village organizations and women's organizations. AKRSP's participatory approach promotes economic development, first through improvements of agricultural techniques and cash crops, and later through the creation of economic opportunities for women by way of vocational, technical, and business trainings. Affiliated NGOs run programs for women in various fields, such as information communication technologies, wood workshops, or tailoring. Women's organizations have not only created support for female entrepreneurship but also fostered women's confidence to partake in political processes at the local level.

AKRSP is essentially a program by and for the Ismaili community, but it has expanded its reach throughout all of Gilgit-Baltistan and neighboring Chitral and provides the basic infrastructure for women's voices to be heard on a regional level (Benz 2016). Although one-third of seats in the *Gilgit-Baltistan Legislative Assembly* are reserved for women, the government takes little effort to pass laws against gender discrimination or promote equal opportunities for socio-economic development. The government's *Women Development Directorate* is a direct outcome of lobby work by AKRSP's women organizations; unfortunately, the board's activities are only visible at the annual celebration of International Women's Day on March 8. A study conducted by researchers from Gilgit's *Karakoram International University* (KIU) found that a majority of members of AKRSP's women organizations register improvements of their personal situation, especially in regard to financial stability and agricultural productivity. Secondary developments pertain to the fact that women who contribute to income or knowledge to the family gain more confidence to take decisions independently or take part in family decisions (Ali, Bano, and Dziegielewski 2016). While these findings largely represent women organizations' most successful implementation in Ismaili areas—in some other areas they even face resentment—they lay the foundation for women's growing participation in education, job markets, and decision-making processes within the family across the region.

Other feminist activism takes place online, and cyberfeminism can have a powerful trickle-down effect, reaching broad audiences in India and Pakistan (Mitra-Khan 2012; Phadke 2020). None of my interlocutors self-identified as feminist, but young women frequently sympathized with feminist concerns. Regularly I observed my friends' Facebook posts with empowering messages. The statement in figure 5 sarcastically defends a woman's stance in a crossfire of anti-feminist forces: "If education is denied to a woman, ignorance prevails for generations. And if a woman takes off her veil in the name of education, shamelessness prevails for generations." It pits development discourses against religious doctrines. While education and Islamic preaching can complement one another, they also justify ideas of progress from different standpoints invoking social evils in the process. By sharing this post with her friends, the young woman expresses her awareness of transnational agendas and bemoans the burden of living up to what the post frames as conflicting expectations. To keep a careful balance between the promises of education and modernity, as well as religious dogmas, is a constant challenge in young people's lives.

Many people in the region, who are well aware of the messages they see from global media, government policies, and developmental organizations, refer to their mountain communities' backwardness as a matter of course, and readily assess every act and opinion through a continuum of traditional-to-advanced. For Chitral, a region close to Gilgit-Baltistan with a significant Ismaili population, Magnus Marsden (2002) rejects the traditional versus Western or



FIGURE 5 Screenshot of a girl's Facebook post.
Photo by the author.

reformist versus liberal dichotomy and replaces it with "narrow-" and "open- or broad-minded." He opens up an alternative understanding of Muslim identity to the radical Islamization campaigns often presented for Pakistan: The person who has a sense for poetry, singing, and discussions is depicted as more mindful, intelligent, sophisticated, and honorable than people with a narrow view on *parda* and religious texts, or who get too emotional over religion (Marsden, 2007a). As examples throughout the book show, twenty years after Marsden's men-focused research, women's discourses take a different path. They also talk of a "small mind" in contrast to a mature and sophisticated person but cast the former as uneducated and "uncivilized" (*janglī*) or ignorant and illiterate (*jāhil*), stigmas that resonate with development rhetoric. The progressive position is delimited by religious enlightenment. In parallel with what has been observed by other anthropologists in a variety of regional contexts (Deeb 2006; Mahmood 2005), my interlocutors value what they see as a modernist order of reason over both feeling or "blind" adherence to tradition. They aim to find that reason through conscious engagement with a "true" scriptural interpretation of Islam that spreads enlightenment and liberalization.[21]

As this overview shows, emotions are conspicuously absent from feminist discourses. Refreshing contributions to a recent special section of the *Journal of South Asian Studies* on fun and entertainment suggest that the public display of pleasure can be a feminist strategy to challenge male domination. Nida Kirmani (2020) tells us of women loitering outdoors in Karachi, smoking *hookahs* (vapor pipes) in front of their houses or sitting together on rooftops. Her descriptions of women who enjoy dressing up, taking selfies, and laughing loudly when going on daytrips sound very familiar to me from Gilgit-Baltistan. While some feminists and leftist critiques associate striving for happiness with a capitalist, consumerist, and individualist agenda (see Ahmed's concept of "feminist killjoy," 2014), the situation in South Asia, where women have to justify every move in public, is different: just doing something for fun, Kirmani argues, can be a subtle challenge to patriarchal norms. Pakistani feminists who organize bike rallies, for example, are taking control of their own mobility and effectively undermining ideals of respectability. The pursuit of pleasure, even if it happens in secret or far away from home, offers moments of self-expression and suspension of judgment from constant surveillance. As Shilpa Phadke (2020) writes, such experiences can work as "micro-transformations" (188), giving women confidence to negotiate gender roles and expectations in other parts of their daily lives and their communities. Through her emphasis on the politics of everyday life, Veena Das reminds us that small adjustments are "far from being something we might take for granted, might be thought of as an achievement" (2010, 376). Moreover, taking their desires into public, Muslim women display the political capacity to dream of future possibilities (Sehlikoglu 2021).

I take a similar approach toward love in this book, scrutinizing micro-transformations and micro-struggles within the development of marital romance and all its gendered norms. At the surface, this may not seem to be an explicitly feminist project, in that it does not involve a clear attempt to dismantle patriarchal control. Yet my work in Gilgit-Baltistan taught me that young couples are jointly creating love in ways that do allow women to claim and create more agency for themselves. In contrast to more organized forms of women's empowerment, these examples of intimate relationships illuminate an informal field that women inhabit as conscious and accountable social beings who mediate feelings and actions between personal interests, social, and religious forces. The new generation of women seeks to carve out more space for themselves within their original families and at their in-laws' houses. As a social whole, they therefore gradually transform the system of marriage and kinship. My ethnographic arguments provide glimpses into these ongoing negotiations, but only time will show how wider consequences may crystallize.

Organization of the Book

While this ethnography is told from women's point of view, women's and men's lives are inextricably entangled. The often-inflated description of gender segregation as separation into two different spheres, one of women doing housework, one of men outside for business, only holds true from an outside perspective; zooming into families' lives shows a different scenario. The imperative of *parda* ultimately dissolves within the union of marriage. I therefore aim to deconstruct persisting gender stereotypes through the backdoor, by unwinding the juxtaposition of women and men through their intimate embrace, which can be both metaphor and physical reality.

Chapter 1 introduced the main trajectories that will run through the book. An anthropological approach of emotions, Gilgit's social landscape (from the region's precarious political status over sectarian differences to socio-economic factors), and local women's link to transnational, South Asian, and Islamic discourses will reappear in different intensities and contexts. Young women's quest for love serves to obscure, as well as manifest, their active renegotiation of more participation in decision-making, conjugal companionship, and acknowledgment of their needs and desires. To approximate emotional life and love worlds and understand the interplay between *being* Gilgiti, *doing* gender, and *feeling* love, further layers of intimacy will unfold with each chapter of this book.

The next chapter will take readers into the gendered forms of daily life in Gilgit city, its suburbs, and adjacent valleys, and features a detailed elaboration of Gilgiti women's emotion of *sharm* (modesty) as a manifestation of the *parda habitus*. It follows women navigating public spaces with varying degrees of veiling and participation and dissects these scenes with an eye for the complex

interplay of embodied knowledge, actions, and emotions. The visceral, yet highly social norm of *sharm* (modesty, reserve, repsectability) serves as prime example for the multilayered complexity of emotions in the form of feelings, embodied values, habitual action, and epistemological conceptions that penetrate people's perception without ever having been consciously thought about. As *sharm* guides any encounter between women and men, social control is not an external force, but a careful form of self-management by women according to their inner scales of decency. The discussion will bring together diverse motivations, such as customary notions of honor, gendered role models, and their Islamic or social justifications, and examine them in the context of a gendered hierarchy of emotions' acceptability and validity.

The following three chapters will delve into the depths of couple relationships, outlining three different, yet not exhaustive nor completely separable, types of love: growing affection (*moḥabbat)*, passionate love (*'ishq*), and romantic love (often referred to as *pasand/khush* or *pyār*) as an emerging amalgamate of the other two types. They each signify a "distinct, but often interlinked, sphere of meaning (emotional, sensual, spiritual, devotional, sexual), perception, and social practice" (Zehmisch 2017, 176). While the three concepts of love I have proposed do reflect differences in ideas about relationships and the feelings that accompany them, none of the three categories should be regarded as monolithic or absolute; in practice they are highly flexible, under constant scrutiny, and subject to ongoing negotiations. Ethnographic examples will show how biographical, as well as social factors prompt continuous reassessment and rearticulation of embodied values and personal endeavors.

Chapter 3 examines conjugal attachment as affection that grows over time among family members (often resorted to as *moḥabbat*). It mainly draws on biographical accounts from the 1990s, when couples often got married in their teenage years, were not involved in the choice of their spouse, and hardly knew each other before their *shādī*. I will describe how matchmaking took place then and how it takes place now, paying special attention to the criteria that parents or other relatives consider most important. The adjustment to the relationship by young wives and husbands and the at times problematic process of growing together will be contextualized within family dynamics, especially in tensions between mother- and daughter-in-law. Delving into the most intimate sphere of marital life, a couple's sexuality, I will come back to the arguments about women's *sharm*. Its continual exercise imprints itself so deeply on women's subconscious that it is hard to discard, even in moments of legitimate suspension of gender segregation in utmost privacy. The section will conclude with the detailed description of a divorce case to contextualize potential shortcomings of the wedding system and the loopholes for negotiations that young women find.

Chapter 4 focuses on passionate love (*'ishq*), typically experienced when men obsessively worship a woman from a distance, overcome by a force that can

lead to outright self-negation. Such love is distinguished by longing, not consummation, a motif also prevalent in Bollywood movies. In addition to widespread conceptualizations of passionate love on TV, fairy tales provide an important source of knowledge in the area of Gilgit. They offer both parallels and contrasts to the types of behaviors and emotions permitted in real life: young women can experience *'ishq* as well, and I include stories of girls who enter mobile phone romances or even elope with their paramours when under the sway of such love. Furthermore, measures to regain control over their lives or over others span from attempted or successful suicide over the use of talismans to drawing on magic or shamanic practices, which lead us back to a parallel spiritual world.

The book's many strands come together in chapter 5, on the newly emerging, contemporary love (*pasand* or *pyār)* that contains a spectrum of hybrid forms of romantic involvement, from those arranged marriages in which a companionate, even passionate, bond develops between spouses once they are in touch after their *nikāḥ*, through to premarital love affairs whose advocates—sometimes successfully, other times not—attempt to influence their parents' decision about their future partner. In these very contemporary processes, mobile phones provide a virtual platform that allows intimate relationships to manifest and affective ties to form between already legitimate couples, as well as between secret lovers. In both cases, the intensity of the relationship eludes observation. Mobile phones thus have immense potential to disrupt social imperatives of gender segregation. For married couples, new technologies also serve as a medium to advertise and normalize the display of conjugal affection by means of public demonstrations through photos or Facebook. Visions of "modernity" are especially important in this regard and are often connected to the consumption of South Asian media channels, such as Indian TV dramas.

Nevertheless, I reject the crude assumption of a unilineal development from supposedly conservative practices of arranged marriages to "modern" weddings based on "love," and instead delineate mechanisms of negotiation between the generations, as well as between women and men, that serve to redefine kinship, gender roles, and moral predicaments of love. While women have always played an integral role in the composition of their marriages, they now confidently utilize education, religious doctrines, and their exposure to alternative moral ideologies to advocate companionate forms of marriage that increasingly focus on the couple. It is in this context that the idea of *morek thay* (speak, talk) as a direct and open exchange between girls and boys, with which I began this chapter, can be seen to encompass a significant and important shift in paradigm.

2

Embodying Modest Reserve

Parda, which literally means "curtain" in Urdu and Persian, defines male and female domains as "separate worlds" (Papanek 1982, 2), and serves as an overarching concept of seclusion and "symbolic shelter" (4) for women against perceived threats from the outside. Scholars and members of the South Asian NGO sector discuss *parda* at length, but my interlocutors rarely used the conceptual term. Women and men's lives in Gilgit-Baltistan are more entangled than strict gender segregation implies. The women I spoke with described their active withdrawal from mixed-gender situations by drawing on a wide range of words related to *sharm* as practice and feeling. *Sharm*, the Urdu term for modesty, reserve, or decency, is also used in Gilgit's vernacular Shina, and signals women's perception of respectability. Women's behavior is not mere performance, but a mirror of their feelings, and their sense of what is "right" and "wrong" clearly depends upon the presence—real or potential—of men. All over Gilgit-Baltistan, *sharm* can be described as the emotional dimension of the highly embodied value of *parda*. The omnipresence of gendered spheres in public and at home, and women's practice of veiling, as well as nonverbal communication, are experienced through the senses and shape women's conscious and unconscious feelings. A modest girl explains her shy conduct as "due to *sharm* (*sharm kī bāt*)," meaning that she feels uncomfortable about overstepping invisible borders of modesty.

Walking along the main street in the bazaar area with three women, and seeing how they navigated *sharm,* I was reminded of Judith Butler's (1997) work on the performative power of (speech) acts. A person is constructed, Butler writes, by the appellation of others. When someone calls to us, and we turn toward that person, we both accept and become conscious of the way they address us.[1] In these mechanisms of attribution and acceptance, the social and personal intersect. Emotions and values co-construct one another in



FIGURE 6 Curtain of fabric separating women's and men's areas in a wedding celebration.

multidimensional modes of embodiment and performativity. The busy market setting was a masculine space, so the women I walked with stuck close together. The two girls in front, both in their twenties but not yet married, were very absorbed in a conversation. I could not understand what they were talking about but observed the sweeping gestures of their arms and heard their cheerful laughter. Right at the point when their conversation paused and they turned around to a third woman and to me, so we could cross the street together, two *Qingqi* (a Chinese brand of rikshaw) drove by, carrying some of their brothers and cousins. The men, who had obviously observed the whole scene, looked at us fiercely. Since men often stare in a rather unfriendly manner in public, and since the whole encounter lasted only a few seconds and was never talked about afterward, I could not be certain about whether these looks expressed anger or admonition. However, the girls fell silent, composed themselves, and seemed ashamed for having been caught in a moment of imprudence. The appellation here was never spoken aloud, but the women accepted their expected roles, which no doubt made their earlier misbehavior—strolling casually and laughing in public—painfully perceptible.

The roles we play are not distinct from our own identities: our actions shape who we are. For women in Gilgit, *sharm* is not simply a performance, but part of how they conceive of their own selves. It is a bodily manifestation of a social category, affecting both mind and emotions. This is true at both the individual

level and—since emotions are created in social interaction—the relational. When wife and husband, for example, avoid looking into each other's direction in front of others, this display of distance will leave a mark on their relationship, and keeps them going about their daily life in separate spheres instead of jointly as a couple. By embracing *sharm* as modest conduct through the cultivation of contextually appropriate dispositions, women—and to a lesser extent also men—avoid situations of actual shame, such as in the above market scene. *Sharm* itself does not signal wrongdoing so much as a desire to avoid embarrassment: reserve as a precautionary measure. These dynamics are not isolated to Gilgit. Working in Pakhtun areas, Karin Ask (1994) indicates a similar model of embodiment emphasizing the "link between cognition and experience" (76). Or, as Mary Hegland (2010) summarizes for her research with Shia women in Peshawar: "Enactments of cultural representations thus simultaneously enable (allow agency and creativity) and constrain (channel experience and meaning)" (151–2). *Sharm*, and the avoidance of more compromising situations, is truly experienced through an omnipresent set of feelings along which women align themselves.[2]

In this chapter, I trace *sharm*'s unfolding across multiple trajectories of life in Gilgit. Since acts, or their omission, have an effect on the person as well as her self-image, this chapter argues that the conceptual difference of a person's public role and "real" identity dissolves. From social pressures of family honor, via Qur'anic conceptions of gender to sensory ramifications of patriarchy on women, sensations of *sharm* start imprinting themselves from earliest childhood on. When Zoha, a baby girl not yet two years old, spotted her uncle's bare arms sticking out from his Western-style T-shirt, she pointed at him and shouted an exclamation that signals shameless conduct: "*Vī'ū, vī'ū, vī'ū!*" Although a man's naked arms do not violate *sharm*, Zoha, having already begun to absorb the underlying structures of modest conduct, was alert to the potential for misbehavior, that is, the exposure of naked skin. Within a few years, she will be playing with a little veil, learning to handle the additional cloth, and gradually getting used to the feeling of wearing it herself. She will eventually become so accustomed to the covering of her head, to the sensation of fabric around the edges of her face, to the weight of the fabric flowing down her neck and resting on her shoulders, that not veiling will make her feel incompletely dressed and "naked."

This fear of exposure is summed up in the abundantly used phrase "*Mujhe sharm ātī hai,*" or in Shina, "*Mas sharm vatīn":* literally, "Shame comes to me." The phrase also corresponds with the notion of emotions as being *out there* instead of interior personal processes. It is a common idiom, signaling a discomfort because of negligible failures to maintain respectability. Urdu contains numerous words connected to *sharm,* and though not all of them are commonly used in Gilgit-Baltistan, the region still has plenty of expressions on the topic. For example, when the phrase *sharm ātī hai* is condensed into the joint term,

shermātī, it approvingly describes a girl who is appropriately modest, shy, or reserved, and is often used interchangeably with *acchī* (Shina: *mis(h)ṭī*), both of which generally describe a "good girl."[3] The term *sharminda*,[4] on the other hand, is clearly negative, referring to a feeling of being ashamed that arises when others witness and evaluate a woman's moral and social mistakes, such as being overheard when gossiping or flirting with men.[5] Even worse is *besharm* (shameless), which is applied to women in rare cases of rebellion, or when they are displaying selfishness.

Related to *sharm's* noble reserve is also the criteria of simplicity and humbleness: a person or whole family being *sāda*, which suggests a spotless heart and mind, a righteousness of word and actions (Gratz 2006, 242). Simplicity here is meant as an admirable characteristic of a person who is neither cunning (*cālāk*) nor exploitative, "smart (big brained) in a negatively valued way—to possess the power to manipulate, dissimulate, evade, and fool" (Ring 2006, 167). Distancing themselves from such negative qualities, young women manage to appear almost invisible in mixed-gender settings, even when no potential partners are present. At tea circles among relatives, for example, my friend Niki, an eighteen-year-old girl from Gilgit, tended to sit in a downcast posture, her wide *cādr* (veil) pulled into her face to render herself absent from the scene. She seemed to be completely disinterested in, and unimpressed by, anything that was going on around her, including the hosting auntie's probing eyes, her uncle's attempts to engage her in conversation, or the freshly fried chips offered to her and the other guests. As an expression of their modesty, girls and young women visiting other houses generally show restraint in eating, and will not accept a meal without repeated invitations from their hosts: "Don't be so shy, take some more!" The phrase acknowledges and shows approval of that modesty. I assume the present families must have felt that Niki was lovely: her *shermātī* behavior was proof of her inner conduct and purity of heart; she would not easily be emotionally overpowered.

According to popular stereotype, women are a weak and emotional gender, but *sharm* allows them to carve out their role in society as virtuous counterparts to men. While critiques from feminists and the world of NGOs often depict Muslim women as victims of a patriarchal system, the women I worked with see themselves as active agents, loyal to their kin. Embodying established norms of modesty may involve withholding themselves from a group in a social setting but was simultaneously a way to cement bonds between people. Calling a girl *shermātī* can therefore be read as statement of appreciation or, as Abu-Lughod (1986) described it in her sensitive portrait of Egyptian Bedouins who operate with similar terminology, as the "highest compliment" for a woman (152). A shy and modest conduct, therefore, confirms a person's social respectability and serves as source of personal pride.

Gender Segregation

In Gilgit, or other places in Gilgit-Baltistan, such as the city of Skardu and smaller villages along the Karakoram Highway, women's lives largely take place at home, in the joint-family household compound. Women gather with friends and relatives in the course of their shared domestic work, such as when preparing meals, weeding the fields, or washing clothes in the river. Men, on the other hand, work outside, in the fields or in markets and offices, and meet peers in the bazaar for tea. But *parda* not only shapes the physical separation, it also guides people's interests. While men concern themselves with matters of public interest such as current politics, women's focus is on private life. Even during local body elections in early June 2015, my female hosts hardly ever discussed political developments, and showed more interest in personal details about the candidates and their families, which they took as indications of their character and which influenced their voting decision. Since women are not encouraged to leave the home, men, who spend most of their day "outside" (*bāhar*), are concerned with the public worlds of markets and politics, and do the daily grocery shopping. Women assign tasks to young boys that need to be carried out in public, while girls learn to help with the household chores of cooking, organizing provisions, and taking care of children. The division of labor tends to be quite clear. As an older married woman in Gilgit resolutely told me, "I don't care where the money comes from. I need to worry about our reputation when serving guests. Where the chicken comes from is their [men's] business (*unkā kām*)."

Most Gilgiti families live in patri- or virilocal residential patterns, with three-generation households of grandparents, parents, and children, and often also with brothers and their families. The houses in Gilgit tend to contain one kitchen and on average three rooms for roughly six people,[6] while in the countryside, older homes are comprised of only one big, communal room to which most families have added extra chambers. Village women often install summer kitchens (*pasālī* in Shina) next to the veranda or on the rooftops, extending their radius from the innermost rooms to the outside. When the home gets too crowded, younger brothers build their own houses, ideally on the family's land in the vicinity. Over time, this gives rise to neighborhoods (*het* in Shina) based on patrilineal descent (Gratz 2006). Since the housing patterns are based on joint kinship, rules of gender segregation can be somewhat relaxed, and women move from house to house freely.

In the neighborhoods, traversing strangers are therefore expected to respect women's space, for example, by not lingering in passageways or curiously looking around, and they should certainly not enter a house unless they are closely related to its residents. When men are away at work during the day, the whole house and its surroundings become women's space. Adult men seem like

intruders, entering only on pressing business, and never idling. As long as senior males in the household are not present, however, boys and younger men behave more informally in the women's zone, talk or joke with sisters, cousins, and other female family members. If fathers or uncles invite men who are not closely related to the family to visit the house, they are received in a special front room, and served by younger men in the family. This lets women maintain their privacy in the back of the house, where—invisible to guests—they can continue to move freely.[7] Women are not simply passive beneficiaries but eager to maintain *parda* rules.

Men's withdrawal from the house is part of a mutual effort by both women and men to comply with related obligations. Jobless middle-aged men, for example, are desperate to find activities in the communal sphere; if they stay home, curtailing women's abilities to move without restrictions in the domestic sphere, their very presence bears witness to their failure to be a breadwinner. Additionally, their mothers, sisters, and cousins might command these men to accompany them as chaperones to go to markets, hospitals or relatives' houses, where they find themselves in the aggravating position of being silent bystanders to women's hours-long conversations about, for example, the patterns of fabric. For adolescent boys who are not yet comfortable in their role as chaperone, these trips out into the public sphere can be quite stressful. A young man from central Gilgit told me about the insecurity he felt whenever other men stared at his mother, vividly describing the "anger" (*ghussa*) and frustration that wells up inside him because he feels they do not take him seriously. He tries to demand respect by staring back at them intensely. His reflections made clear that though the particular social pressures on men and women may differ, everyone feels the demands acutely.

The commonplace evaluation of public life as "better" or more valuable reproduces patriarchal ideals; in reality, women's and men's spheres hold different kinds of values, pleasures, frustrations, and benefits. For example, since the head of the household is only home for dinner, sleep, and a quick breakfast, the supposedly most powerful man in the family is often also the most uninformed in family matters. He knows little about his family members' hopes and thoughts, or even the basic workings of their days. I saw a father utterly astonished when one of his adolescent sons voiced a well-informed political opinion in a discussion with a visiting uncle; until that point, he had not noticed where his son's political views lay. When I asked girls why I have the impression that they avoid direct interaction with their fathers at home, they just shrugged off my question, explaining that they do not want to bother them with their personal issues. At the same time, I had the feeling that men deliberately overlook what is going on at home in their absence, or in rooms that are none of their concern. A similar relationship exists between older brothers and their younger sisters. The oldest son frequently has his own room in the house and stands

for the next generation of authority, gradually taking over responsibilities from his father. His sisters maintain a physical and emotional distance from him. He is often not informed of what is going on among the women at home and, in return, he ignores slight misbehavior, so he is not forced to act or reprimand anyone (Gratz 2006).

One night, a middle-aged man arrived early for dinner at his brother's house, where I was currently staying. He asked for some tea (*cā'ī*) to calm his hunger until his brother returned home from "some business (*kō'ī kām*)"—men usually do not specify what kind of activity they are doing outside, whether it be working, running errands, meeting friends, or taking care of other family matters. His grown-up niece, however, was so busy reading love poems on her phone that she delayed the making and serving of tea. I watched as she and her uncle sat opposite each other around the same fireplace. He saw that she was absorbed in her phone and heard as she occasionally recited expressions of love under her breath, but he did not stare at her or comment on her negligence. Instead, he behaved according to embodied norms of *parda*. The fireplace was her domain, so he did not intrude into her space.

Veil and Venture

Since men come into the house and women can venture outside, it is becoming clear that the separation between women's and men's worlds does not occur naturally but needs to be carefully maintained. When women do leave the house to visit relatives, run errands, or for work—most of them as teachers—they deftly navigate public, urban spaces in ways that allow them to remain rather undetected. The manner of their conduct upholds gender segregation on a more subtle level. Through veiling, for example, women detach themselves from the scene and render themselves "invisible." Hanna Papanek calls it a form of "portable seclusion" (1982, 10), giving women the chance to walk around in public in a relatively self-determined manner while maintaining norms of *parda*.

Testing different degrees of veiling on myself, I was curious to compare my own experiences and men's reactions to it. When I travelled to Gilgit-Baltistan for the first time as a tourist in 2011, I wore Western clothes, and although they were loose and long-sleeved, I felt exposed, attracting stares wherever I went. Men seemed to expect, incorrectly, that my attire and open interaction reflected my readiness for sexual intimacy; some knocked on my hotel door in the middle of the night, others simply accompanied me everywhere, enjoying the presence of a woman and patiently waiting for the moment when "it" (whatever they imagined) would be happening.

Returning in 2013, I was better prepared, and adapted the typical Pakistani dress, *shalvār qamīẓ*, which consists of baggy, pajama-like trousers, and a knee-length shirt. The female version also entails a long scarf, *dūpaṭa*, which is roughly

1m×2.30m in size and either slung around the shoulders or used to cover one's hair. I wore the veil down on my shoulders most of the time but covered my head when in market areas. Handling the meters of fabric required practice: I was constantly fidgeting with the *dūpaṭa* when it threatened to slip down, or when swift gestures of my head left it at odd angles; I obviously also needed to discipline my movements. When I talked with colleagues who worked in the same area, we had a shared sense of mindfulness around our bodies. We had nightmares of a scarf getting entangled somewhere or even dropping down. Looking at my photos from that time, however, I realize, with embarrassment, that I still appeared downright obscene, as I had not yet comprehended that the *dūpaṭa* is also supposed to conceal one's chest. In retrospect it is no surprise that locals immediately identified me as a foreigner.

When fully immersed in my fieldwork throughout 2014, I carefully followed the example of most of my interlocutors, and used a *cādr*, a bigger version of the *dūpaṭa* (about 1.50m×2.50 m). I learned how to wear it correctly according to the context, wrapping it tightly around the head twice when using public transport or visiting a religious sight, and throwing it loosely over my hair at home. I could tell that I was exhibiting the right behavior with more confidence because I hardly ever had any problems with (sexual) harassment or intimidating glares. Nor was I reprimanded by other women. Once, I tried on a black *'abāya*, a full cloak that is referred to as *burqa* locally, and pulled the scarf up over my nose so that only my eyes were visible. Men seemed to ignore me, literally looking through me; alongside my young friends, I moved through Gilgit's main roads like a ghost. I understood, more viscerally than before, why Lama Abu Odeh sees the adoption of the veil, or even the *burqa* or *niqāb* (facial cover), as a feminist, postcolonial "remedy" (1993, 33) that allows Muslim women to acquire more freedom. The veil lets women increase their range of movement while guarding against men's intrusion or harassment; symbolizing exemplary modesty and piety that men do not dare to invade or insult, the *burqa* caters to a sense of "untouchability."

Like the curtains whose etymology *parda* shares, veils, through their haptic qualities, are barriers, ways to screen oneself from passers-by and to protect the inside from the outside. I tested the effectiveness of such divides at an academic symposium about materiality and connectivity (Walter 2020), where I hung a mix of colorful Gilgiti scarfs from a string across the top of a doorway. The curtain of bright, vivid fabric served its purpose well. Hardly any of the conference attendees seemed to notice that there was a room on the other side, let alone dared to sweep the scarves aside and peek in. When people's curiosity was piqued, it mostly stemmed from the slight movement of the fabric as someone walked by. The few people who stepped into the cozy chamber later reported to me how they cherished it for exactly its quality of seclusion, the atmosphere of



FIGURE 7 Young women dressed in *burqas* and short scarfs walking in a side alley in a neighborhood of Gilgit city.

Photo by the author.

calmness, security, and refuge it provided. These sensory qualities resonated with what I learned of *parda* in Gilgit. By veiling and staying in the back quarters of the neighborhoods, Gilgiti girls experience a kind of comfortable safety. An exchange student from Gilgit-Baltistan who stayed with me at my home in Munich, for example, remained fully dressed when we visited a lakeshore populated by half-naked sun worshippers. Because she was a self-declared liberal who was generally proud of having discarded trained gender-related behavior, she had to laugh about her inability to overcome the sense of *sharm*.

Apart from the readily apparent veiling, more nuanced forms of seclusion or withdrawal exist. Women use body language and other ways of (non-)conversing to express their distance from men: most importantly, a shrunken posture, downcast eyes, and a low voice (Gratz 2006). Just as the headscarf provides a feeling of reassurance, these gestures and evasive acts can be understood as expressions of embodied modesty marking a woman as diffident and virtuous. When direct interactions between unacquainted women and men are unavoidable, such as when talking to a shopkeeper or taxi driver, Gilgitis, like people all over South Asia, address one another with kinship terms. *Bhā'ī* (brother, alternatively *kākā* in Shina), *cacā* (paternal uncle), *bājī* (elder sister), *bhābhī* (elder brother's wife), or simply *aunti* establish a fictive relationship. Turning a man into a "brother" creates a set of obligations: Women invoke his honor as their protector in order to obviate a potentially dangerous harasser. In the small-scale environment of Gilgit, where everyone could potentially trace a connection, establishing such fictive relations serves as a reminder that misbehavior would reflect negatively on the family.

As chapter 1 outlined that many aspects of life in Pakistan are being Islamized, Gilgitis also commonly draw on Islamic teachings to explain behavior, such as gender segregation or veiling. In some regards, the invocation of God limits, in others it justifies the bending of rules. The Qur'an draws attention to the sexual attraction between male and female and emphasizes women's seductive potential. *Parda* therefore separates women and men who are potential mates, (*nā meḥram*, meaning not forbidden to marry, such as relatives by first degree), making it easier to adhere to divine recommendations of chastity. When I asked him about *parda*, a Shia religious scholar in the area of Gilgit referred to the following verses in the Qur'an:

> Order the men of the Faithful to lower their gaze and guard their chastity—for this will keep them pure. Truly God knows all that they do. Tell also the women of the Faithful to lower their gaze, and they should guard their chastity, and they should not display any of their charms publicly save what is decently observed, and they must draw their veils over their bosoms; and they should not display any of their charms to anyone except their husbands, or their fathers, or their husbands' fathers, or their sons,

> or their husbands' sons, or their brothers or their brothers' sons, or their sisters' sons, or their womenfolk, or those whom they possess with their right hand,[8] or those male servants who feel sexual desire no longer, or children too young to be aware of the nakedness of women. And women should not move their legs in such a way when they walk as to attract attention to the charm they have concealed. (Al-Qur'an 24, 30–1, translated in Awde 2005, 46–7)

Although women are instructed to veil—though not to what extent—the call for gender segregation is clearly directed toward both women and men. Unfortunately, many men rest on the cushion of patriarchy that allows them fairly free rein to interpret religious tenets to their advantage. They stress that women are responsible for hiding their seductive potential in order to keep men from straying from a righteous path. Under this rationale, if women do not take sufficient precautions by covering themselves or by avoiding smiling in public, they openly signal a lack of modesty that justifies harassment. Discussing how such beliefs play out in the crowded urban center of Lahore, Jasmine Mirza (2002) describes how men gaze at, accost, follow, verbally abuse, or even fondle women in public. While the anonymity of the metropolis enables such behavior, women in Gilgit are generally not molested to this extent, but girls do complain about men staring. It might seem contradictory that women's clothes come in bright colors: Although obscuring a woman's physique, their cheerfully patterned fabrics pose a provocative contrast to the endeavor to achieve invisibility.

While men's outer appearance gives no sign of their sectarian beliefs, women veil and behave in public in ways that reflect their religious identity. The Ismaili community in Gilgit-Baltistan, for example, enacts gender segregation and veiling in a laxer manner than their Sunni and Shia neighbors. In the first half of the twentieth century, their religious leader, Aga Khan III, instructed his followers all around the world to discard segregation and veiling practices, and advised them to dedicate themselves even more to the school education of daughters than to that of sons (Khoja-Moolji 2011). Today, Ismaili women tend to be well-educated, usually do not cover their heads (let alone their faces), and speak to men in a relatively unconstrained manner. In the Gilgiti environment, in which people pride themselves on their religious piety, unveiled girls who openly joke with boys are quickly maligned as "easy" by their Sunni and Shia fellows.

Local Sunni women, on the other hand, are hardly ever seen idling in bazaars or markets. When they venture into public, they are chaperoned by a man and shielded from the view of others, their *cādrs* pulled up all the way over their noses. Unmarried Sunni girls and relatives from more rural areas south of Gilgit are often wrapped in wide black *'abāyas* (locally called *burqa*) and *niqāb*. Among the Shia youth, such dress is not necessarily a sign of Islamic

fundamentalism, as Westerners often think, but of savoir-vivre and "style," reflecting trends from Iran. Covering their loose, colorful trouser and shirt outfits with full-length black gowns allows them to wear much smaller headscarves, and the long flowing fabric accentuates a slim silhouette. Girls reinterpret the *'abāya* as a means of self-expression that lets them keep their modesty intact. The fashion resonates with wider trends of re-veiling across Pakistan and in other Muslim communities, where modest dress and pious behavior is a sign of religious sophistication and "modernity" in newer, often sterner, interpretations of Islam (Abid 2015; Ahmad 2009; Ahmed 2011; Jamal 2013; Osella and Osella 2007; Smith-Hefner 2019). In a similar manner, many Ismailis see their liberal forms of veiling as a form of devotion to their spiritual leader.

No matter which sect women belong to, they navigate public spaces according to an internalized "mental map" (Ask 1994, 71) that signals which paths to take, when and how much to cover themselves, and when to be on guard to the possibility of encountering men. I often watched my friend Gul adapt to her surroundings. When she was bored at home and trying to escape housework, she found excuses to visit relatives or go to the market. Gul lives in a suburban area, and about every two weeks she had her eyebrows done at a beauty salon, a female enclave behind a high gate in a side street off the main bazaar. She left her young child in the care of older family members at home, changed into a nice and freshly ironed set of clothes, and gathered some cousins from the neighborhood to accompany her, as it would be indecent to go anywhere alone and is more entertaining with friends. Outside of the immediate surroundings of their house, women usually stay close together in small peer groups, and though Gul is a very lively and outspoken person, she would feel uncomfortable and lonely without her companions. While walking through their own neighborhood, the women chatted in a lively manner, laughed loudly, and jostled each other on the narrow pathways along the water channels that run through all settlements. To keep to the secluded back areas, we had to walk down a steep, sandy slope and cross some fields.

The farther we travelled from the women's houses, however, the more conscious they became of their surroundings and the more they composed themselves. Passing by school buildings and little neighborhood kiosks, they adjusted their veils, and once we arrived at the main road they drew their scarves closely, wrapping them twice around their heads. They also fell silent. Maintaining a composed bearing with their heads slightly bowed, they passed quickly and directly across main roads or bazaar areas. Cars, jeeps, trucks, motorcycles, and *Suzukis* (local public transport rickshaws) drove past us, dispersing dust and fumes. Both sides of the street were lined with shops that were full of men who seemed to be hanging out with their friends. Protected by their veils, the young women headed out into this busy public area without any hesitation, quickly walking one behind the other in a line, barely talking until the beauty

salon came into sight in a little lane on the other side of the street. After hurriedly crossing the road, they slipped behind the shop's gate, loosened their *dūpaṭas*, and excitedly exchanged their impressions of the journey: "Did you see the tractor pass? The guy was the older brother of one of my classmates." Or: "Sherbaz Ali's vegetables didn't look fresh at all! I hope the boys buy from a different stall today."

In the center of Gilgit City or the countryside, such expeditions play out differently. Public life weighs more heavily on women in inner-city *moḥallas* (neighborhoods), whereas in rural areas, where most families are connected by kinship ties, women can move more freely. Moreover, rural women perform a fair amount of the agricultural labor, so it is not a surprise to see them outside, en route to their orchards and fields. Yet no matter where they live, or whatever sect they affiliate with, women in Gilgit-Baltistan learn to embody *sharm* in ways that help uphold *parda* and afford them a certain degree of independence and agency inside it.

Social Hierarchies

No matter if urban or rural setting rates of school enrolment have greatly increased over recent years. Women in Gilgit-Baltistan tend to be well educated, thanks largely to the influence of the Ismaili community. In the early twentieth century, as reformers throughout British India sought to establish educational systems that were often religiously oriented, the Ismaili leader Aga Khan III encouraged his followers to send girls to secular schools, not only to prepare them for domestic and religious duties but for their personal "happiness and welfare" (Khoja-Moojli 2011, 7). With the help of the Aga Khan, his followers set up the first large-scale school program in the region, and today the Ismaili-majority areas of in Hunza and Gojal have advanced furthest in terms of girls' school attendance and literacy levels.

As Gilgit-Baltistan's relatively high numbers of in-school children and almost even distribution between the genders in table 1 shows, many residents have followed the Ismaili example. Parents mostly do not oppose girls' education but implement it in local terms. Yet a lack of gender segregation and female teachers for female students, or the mere proximity of schools to home affects adoption rates (Shafa 2011). While government schools are separated into *Girls School* and *Boys School*, co-education is more economical for private schools and many colleges also hold classes together. In the Sunni district of Diamer, where residents have a more critical stance toward women's empowerment and stricter obedience of gender segregation, literacy rates are lower than in the rest of the region. Yet, in all other districts girls are likelier to attend school than boys. Studies among an Ismaili community in the very north of Gilgit-Baltistan conducted by human geographer Andreas Benz (2014) suggest that young women, or at least Ismaili women, now often get a better "further education" than their

TABLE 1

District-/Gender-Wise Status of In-School and Out-Of-School Children (OOSC) in Gilgit-Baltistan (GB): Age Group 6–16 for the Year 2015

Serial #	*District*	*In-school children (%)*	*Out-of-school children (%)*	*OOSC boys (%)*	*OOSC girls (%)*
1	Astore	92.8	7.1	3	4
2	Diamer	47.9	52.2	16	36
3	Ghanche	90.2	9.8	6	4
4	Ghizer	96.9	3.0	2	1
5	Gilgit	88.2	11.8	7	5
6	Hunza-Nagar	97.6	2.4	1	1
7	Skardu	81.3	18.7	10	9
GB Total		85.0	15.0	6	9
National Total		80.5	19.5	8	11

Data Source: ASER Survey-2015 http://fidakarimhunzaii.blogspot.com.

peers who are under pressure to generate income. However, young women often do not travel as far away as boys, who are more likely to study at universities in Karachi and other cities in "downcountry" Pakistan—and nowadays often even in China. In contrast, girls move along translocal family networks "which provide opportunities for co-habitation, protection and company by male kin" (Benz 2014, 264) in Central Hunza or Gilgit. Even if they stay in hostel accommodations, young women are usually sent where the family has already established ties, where relatives live or where parents know that hostels and the educational institution are "safe" and "trustworthy" (266). Since the Karakoram International University (KIU), founded in 2002, caters to these expectations, the number of female students there stood at about sixty percent in 2013/14 (Kriebel 2014). The university offers co-educational courses, and on campus men and women mix freely, which initially prompted rumors about inappropriate gender relations. But in reality, the campus environment allows women both to pursue education and maintain a sense of safety and decency.

When young men do leave school, they have limited employment possibilities in Gilgit-Baltistan. Many families' livelihoods depend on one man's "government job" in the local administration or the army. Some men migrate to the urban centers of Pakistan, or even as far as the Gulf States, to work and send money back home. In contrast, even well-educated women often do not utilize

their degrees to the same extent and are left in Gilgit or their villages to take care of the family home, the fields and orchards, children, and elders. Nevertheless, some women engage in home-based industries, such as sewing clothes, or even running small shops exclusively for ladies (Walter and Grieser 2020). Since these activities take place alongside other household tasks and are often informal, their economic contribution goes unrecognized, and consequently does not seem to violate the doctrine of separate spheres.

While I personally witnessed an equal focus on girls' and boys' education, at least until college level, the circumstances of their learning are slightly different. Girls must do justice to both sets of responsibilities, those of school and of housework, while boys have more free time in which to study, play sports, and hang out with friends—that is, until the pressure mounts for them to prove themselves by acquiring a well-paid job. Some married women pursue further education through distance learning courses with Allama Iqbal Open University, usually to qualify for teaching positions. But people in the area of Gilgit do not tend to frame the virtues of girls' education solely, or even primarily, in terms of economic prospects. Instead, they note that education empowers women to navigate their (in-laws') families, encourages women to marry at a later age that corresponds with greater maternal health, and enables mothers to better assist their children with their schoolwork (Halvorson 2005; Schneid 2011). Education is also seen as improving a woman's marriage chances, not only because she may be an additional income generator in the household, but also because well-educated men desire educated partners. Moreover, since the global development agendas promoted by the IMF and other international donors involve campaigns for human rights and women's empowerment, education gets contextualized in terms of a backward-modern dichotomy. Most people want their family to be sophisticated, and those with less formal knowledge are considered less respectable. School education ends up becoming not so much a means to a particular end (such as gender parity) but an end in itself.

Highly skilled women, however, walk a thin line between professionalism and respectability. Across South Asia, even though more and more women are in teaching positions, working women are seen as rooted in the lower middle-class, while female seclusion is associated with the upper classes. Rich families can afford to have their women stay at home, and the middle classes, seeking to increase their own status, imitate the behaviors of their social superiors. The Pakistani feminist activist Farida Shaheed (1986) argues that upper-class women are being kept in a state of dependence because they have the economic means to threaten male domination. When a woman does achieve high political status, like the former prime minister of Pakistan Benazir Bhutto, who enjoys a high degree of popularity in Gilgit-Baltistan, she is not seen as subverting patriarchal hierarchies. Instead, she is identified with her rank and social class, rather than her feminity (Channa 2013).

In addition to navigating economic hierarchies, women climb a parallel social ladder throughout the course of their lives, first as unmarried girls, then as married women, and finally as elderly women ruling over a family compound. Her stage of life and position in the family are reflected in the range of her movement and intensity of her veiling. At my friend Zubeida's house, a simple afternoon visit showed me the range of behaviors available to women over the course of their lives. "*Vā Ali! Inu vā* (Come here)!" Zubeida, the matriarch, bellowed at one of her adolescent sons. She had just received a phone call announcing the approach of visitors and needed him to run to the market to buy milk and biscuits for tea. Ali was quickly on his way with no sign of protest, and Zubeida, only loosely pulling up her veil over one side of her hair, hurried out of the walled family compound to fetch her daughter-in-law and a niece, who had gone to a neighbor's house; she would need their assistance at home. Half an hour later, the guests were seated in the living room: a distant aunt and uncle, who were passing through Gilgit on their way to Islamabad, together with two of their sons—one of them a child, the other one a good-looking young man of about sixteen years of age. While Zubeida sat chatting with her guests on the carpeted floor around the *dastarkhān* (a tablecloth on the floor), her daughter-in-law eagerly—deferential, yet smiling—served them tea and snacks. Then she left her nine-month-old baby son in my care and went to her room to change into a finer set of clothes, put on some make-up and three golden rings with colorful gemstones that she had received for her wedding two years earlier. When she rejoined the party, she proudly showed off her married status with her eye-catching attire and sought conversation with the visitors. Yet Zubaida's young, unmarried niece crouched down shyly, next to the door. Not daring to look the visitors in the eyes, she withdrew into her veil and pulled it low over her forehead. She displayed a "caricature of [. . .] modesty" (Jeffery 1979, 104) typical for young, unmarried, or newlywed girls.

Many young women also use the veil to show respect toward male elders in the household. Modesty is often related to a woman's confidence; when she is settled in life, she is most likely less afraid of committing a mistake and feels less threatened by exposure. Elderly women experience—or rather take—more freedom; they have passed reproductive age and earned a reputation of trustworthiness and respect in the family. Although women's contributions are rarely recognized in economic terms, their efforts in running the household, receiving guests, keeping up social relations, training children, and fulfilling religious duties are all certainly important for maintaining and enhancing the family's socio-economic condition and reputation (Papanek 1979). In an in-depth ethnographic study, Amineh Ahmed (2006) described elite Pakhtun women's active contribution to family honor through their "work" in *ghamkhadi* (sorrow and joy) events, such as funerals, weddings, and other family celebrations. Women's lives might be "segregated but [they are] not apolitical"

(Ahmed 2006, 11), especially since family homes, functioning as social meeting points, acquire a public dimension. Writing about Ismaili women in Chitral, Marsden (2002) notes they involve themselves in mixed-gender debates in family circles where their views and opinions are respected by men. Through indirect channels, women therefore "exert powerful influence on the intellectual life of the village" (120).

Parda is not static but is brought to life by the people who enact it: From the bazaar road to a private gathering, segregation and veiling practices vary, and it takes skillful management to strike the right balance between modest diffidence and the pursuit of individual interests. Just as there can be public moments during family gatherings in the domestic sphere, the reverse is also true, and even in public settings momentary encounters can be rendered highly private. Men's and women's lives depend upon one another and cannot be understood as separately as the term *segregation* implies. The same is true for seemingly disparate states of feeling and being. Peoples' very conceptions of femininity and masculinity, reason and emotion, sexual desire and family reputation, both depend on and produce each other.

Emotions, Gender, and Sexuality

In colloquial language around the globe, displays of sensation are often framed as irrational, impulsive, and inferior to intellect: "I let myself get carried away"; "I'm sorry, I spoke without thinking" (Laplatine 2015, 1), or in Urdu, "*Merā ye maṭlab nahīn thā* (I did not mean this)". If women are characterized as the more emotional gender, and emotions are seen as distinct from and lesser than reason, the resulting social hierarchy positions men as nobler, more controlled, and therefore deserving of greater power. As Catherine Lutz (1986) has summarized, emotionality is often used to justify paternalist supremacy over women and other marginalized groups, a line of argumentation that is also found within Fatima Mernissi's influential book *Beyond the Veil* ([1975] 1987). Although her work has been highly criticized, and rightly so, for her tendency to essentialize, the dynamics she describes for Morocco and "modern Muslim societies" at large resonate with experiences of Gilgiti women, as well as contribute to a subtler understanding of patriarchy than is commonly observed.

Mernissi argues that both explicit and implicit understandings of female sexuality determine gender dynamics under Islam. On an obvious level, men tend to be aggressive, and women passive. At the unconscious level, she writes, men fear they will be seduced by women's sexual powers, distracted from their religious duties, and plunged into social chaos (*fitna*). Such fears dovetail with the belief that women are more strongly determined by biology than men. Women are seen as lacking control over their own bodies during menstruation or pregnancy, and as generally closer to "nature" than men. Islamic law (*shariat*)

bans women from praying when menstruating, after sexual intercourse, or during childbirth, and detailed instructions for ablution remind Muslims that such natural events are in fact impure.

This echoes the dichotomous Qur'anic concepts of *nafs* (ego) and *'aql* (reason). *Nafs* stands for desires and passions of the soul, which Islamic guidelines help people to transcend through the discipline of *'aql*, or what Nancy Tapper, writing about Afghanistan, tellingly translates as "social responsibility" (1991, 15). The Qur'an describes the two forces as inherent in all humans, who must struggle to obtain a balance between them, a task often seen as more difficult for women, who are believed to succumb more easily to their emotions. To lead a successful social life, female believers are therefore advised to carefully examine, monitor, and restrict their own conduct. To improve their status, women demonstrate their "civilized" manner in regulating supposedly natural emotions through "constant vigilance" (Pernau 2019, 147). In Gilgit, women employ *sharm* to counter stereotypes of female emotionality and "savagery."

The assumption of women's inferior faculty of *'aql* was propagated by a series of Islamic reformers in British India in the late nineteenth and twentieth century, and such arguments continue to spread widely. Till today, for example, Maulana Ashraf Ali Thanvi's book *Bahishti Zewar* (Heavenly Ornaments), is circulated among Sunni Deobandi followers. Although Thanvi does not depreciate the female gender per se, he promotes a segregated, domestic role for women, and asks women to educate themselves in Islamic rituals and morals for their correct observance (Metcalf 1990). The founder of the influential Islamist party Jamaat-e-Islami, Sayyid Maududi ([1939] 2011), even stated outright that women lack self-mastery: "In short, a woman's mental and nervous system becomes lethargic and disorderly during menstruation. Her limbs do not quite obey her will; rather her will and the decision power are overwhelmed by some involuntary force within her" (80). While my mostly Shia interlocutors never directly referred to these particular spiritual leaders, the ideology of the religious right-wing has penetrated the Muslim public sphere throughout South Asia for decades. Such beliefs are part of a wider, discursive episteme that shapes how people across different sects perceive of Islamic piety. The Indian author Nazir Ahmad has further contributed to this dissemination. His story "*Mirat-ul-Uroos* (The Bride's Mirror)" about the two sisters Akbari and Asghari is still frequently found in schoolbooks throughout Pakistan. It contrasts spoilt, lazy Akbari with hard-working, modest Asghari whose thorough school education provided her with the necessary skills to become a successful housewife and daughter-in-law.

Across Pakistan, women are seen as "naturally" weaker than men, and are associated with earthly passions that, at the same time, provide them with sexual powers: If women's God-given sexual needs are not fulfilled, they will use their charms and attractiveness to seduce men and distract them from the divine path revealed to them by Prophet Muhammad.[9] Paradoxically, what is publicly

articulated is the dimension that women have to be protected from men's appetites; the underlying principle is men's fear of female sexuality.

When I talked with women in Gilgit-Baltistan about this theory, they said they had not thought about it before, but none of them found the idea absurd. Many women are at least implicitly aware of their diffuse power. Through the course of my stay in Gilgit, several older women, independently of each other, invoked the story of Yusuf (Joseph) from the Qur'an as example of active female sexuality. Bought by an elite Egyptian businessman, the young and beautiful slave Joseph finds himself subject to his owner's wife's desire. When she tries to seduce him, he stays dutiful to his master and rejects her advances. Affronted, the woman runs after him and tears his shirt, so that she can accuse him of having attempted to rape her. But her family sees through her lies. When gossip about this event spreads around the city, the slighted mistress gives additional insight into her blatant sexual appetite and Joseph's integrity faces it head-on.

> When she heard their slanderings,
> she went for them and prepared a banquet,
> and gave each of them a knife (for paring fruit),
> and called (to Joseph): "Come out before them."
> When they saw him, the women were so wonderstruck
> they cut their hands,
> and exclaimed: "O Lord preserve us!
> He is no mortal but an honorable angel."
> She said: "This is the one you blamed me for.
> I did desire his person, but he preserved himself from sin.
> Yet in case he does not do my bidding he will be put into prison
> and disgraced."
> (Joseph) prayed: "Oh Lord, dearer is prison
> than what they invite me to.
> Unless you turn their guiles away from me
> I shall succumb to their charms
> and thus become a pagan." (Al-Qur'an 12, 31–33, translation by Ali 2011)

The story of Joseph, or Yusuf as he is generally referred to by Muslims, suggests that women are actively deceitful and motivated by desire, while men struggle to keep on God's path. A middle-aged Gilgiti woman with grown-up children made a similar point to me quite directly: "Nowadays women walk in public all dressed up wearing make-up. Of course, men look at them; they basically challenge them. But when a man is well taken care of by his wife, when she sleeps with him as often as his virility (*ṭāqat*) demands and controls him by asking about his daily actions and whereabouts, he is not prone to fall for other women." She clearly identified women as being in charge of both their behavior and that of men, no matter if men salivate at other women or stay faithful.

Women bear the responsibility of self-control; they are not only accountable for their own pious conduct, but for the whole society's moral well-being. Girls who actively attract men, let alone engage in sexual relationships outside of marriage, do not only jeopardize their honor and family reputation but, once proven to be "sexually available," are seen as a "commodity for general consumption" (Abraham 2002, 347). To deny any erotic interest or emotional attachments that would indicate yielding to "natural" desire, women must conceal any indication of sexual drive or weakness. Some women, especially older women, never speak their husband's name aloud, as this would be a direct demonstration of a couple's intimacy. In conversations with other women in his absence, a wife might refer to her husband simply as "*unkā abbū* (their [her children's] father)," as if she herself had not played any role in their creation. And many women hardly talk about their pregnancies, even trying to conceal them under their wide garments. Since menstruation, sexuality, pregnancy, and childbirth are readily associated with biology, they are most zealously obscured.

On the other hand, the Qur'an does not condemn sexuality itself. Rather, it depicts eroticism as a foretaste of heaven and restricts it to marriage, to set people's erotic desires on a controllable and productive course. Only one who is satisfied can focus on religious observance. Muhammad reportedly recommends marriage in the *sunna* (verbally transmitted teachings and doings of the Prophet) and objects to celibacy (Ali 2006). But embodied value systems cannot be so easily discarded; having grown accustomed to follow one's intuitive compass of *sharm*, many women are shy about showing lust. Others confidently state they feel comfortable in the presence of their husband and enjoy a fulfilling sexuality. With greater exposure, for example, to narratives from Bollywood movies that exult romantic love and to Islamic teachings of affirmative conjugality, young couples are renegotiating reserve and sexuality with one other, even within the familiar forms of arranged marriage.

Perhaps because women have so effectively embodied *sharm* and display emotional reservedness, a nation-wide survey of Pakistan done in 2010 suggests that men are considered as at least equally sentimental to women. Thirty-seven percent of respondents see men as the passionate gender, thirty-four do not find a difference between men and women, and twenty-nine percent attribute emotionality to women (Gallup 2010, 37). Since a lack of emotional control can also be assigned to a loss of temper, perhaps it is not surprising that a high percentage of respondents identified rage (sixty-three percent) as a characteristic associated with men in contrast to the attribute considered most characteristically feminine: patience and endurance (fifty-six percent).

In a climate that demands girls learn to control their emotions early in life, men's emotional overflow, even extreme anger and violence, is not just excused but paraded. In a persuasive study of family politics in a low-income Karachi neighborhood, for example, Ring (2006) writes about the proliferation of "honor

TABLE 2

Pakistanis Asked Which Attributes More Frequently Found in Women or Men, 2005

Characteristic	*Male (%)*	*Female (%)*	*Both (%)*
Prone to rage	63	15	22
Brave	75	10	15
Ease-loving	19	56	25
Talkative	10	76	14
Patient	23	56	21
Emotional	37	29	34
Creative	30	26	44

Data source: Gallup 2010, 37.

killing stories," in which men defend familial honor by killing sinful women. Women tell these stories, Ring argues, not to celebrate men's lethal power, religious righteousness, or control over female sexuality, but because women relish accounts of the "senselessness of the husband's anger" (106) manifesting in "immediate physicality—the mindless pulse of fists flying and blood spilling" (111). Honor-killing stories allow women to elevate themselves over their irrational and uncivilized male counterparts. As Ring analyzes: "It is men who are subject to uncontrollable (violent) urges, and women, with their superior *aql*, who are called upon to manage this unruly masculinity, with its tendency toward agentless excess." (126) People learn these opposing behaviors—impulsive and public masculine anger, feminine discipline and composure—from early childhood on. Boys, spoiled with sweets and attention, are not scolded much, while girls are expected to contain themselves. Ring describes a scene in which a brother screams at his sister for no clear reason. The mother reacts by scolding the girl, although she had done nothing to upset him, thus treating the boy's temper as justified (109).

My experiences in Gilgit-Baltistan were similar. "*Chup the, be'ī,*" was one of the most common Shina sentences I heard women hiss in their daughters' directions: "Be quiet and sit down." For women, the utmost skill is to pull oneself together. Even in times of trouble, they provide one another scant comfort or consolation. After a woman's husband died in a traffic accident, I attended a prayer circle at her house with other women who continuously admonished the widow to compose herself. Although they sympathized with her destitution

on suddenly being left alone with four children, they seemed intimidated, and even repulsed, when she burst out in loud sobs of despair. No one held, hugged, or even gently patted her. As I walked home with these women, they quietly gossiped about the woman's unfortunate and open display of unrestrained emotions, perhaps because she had let them have a glimpse of an abyss they had no interest in finding in themselves. Many women do, however, perform strong emotions when expected to, as when they weep dramatically in cathartic Shiite mourning rituals (*majlis*).

By enduring suffering and acting rationally, women defend themselves against the stereotype of their weakness, gaining control over both their own lives and, to an extent, the lives of men. The terms women in Gilgit commonly used to emphasize their accomplishment of what Ring calls the "tireless stoicism" (2006, 86) were *bardāsht karnā* (tolerate, endure, bear), *ṣabr* (patience), and, most importantly, *majbūrī* (duty, obligation). As an older woman from an inner-city neighborhood told me, "Did I like my in-laws? Oh, you do ask me funny questions. I had to live with them, *majbūrī*. I had to make the best out of it." Women take pride in not even considering alternatives to their lots in life. Rather than lamenting adversity, they bear it, creating public proof of their virtues. Other common words and phrases also emphasize what women learn to take on, such as *guzārā* (surviving), *main ʻadī ho gaʼī* (I got used to it), or the ubiquitous *bas* (literally: stop, end), which means "that's how it is" or "this is our lot, this is our life." In addition, Pakistani popular culture portrays "women who show any sort of independence of mind [. . .] negatively" (Mumtaz and Shaheed 1987, 24).

Other scholars who worked with Muslim women have elaborated on their handling of suffering and pain but come to slightly different conclusions. Writing about Egypt's mosque movement, Mahmood (2005) observes that women live in and through pain, transforming their situation not by alleviating suffering, but by embracing it. Kaveri Quresi (2013) describes middle-aged Pakistani migrant women in East London who see their own ill health and patient suffering as an ethical virtue. But I believe that an important aspect of the "virtue of *sabr* (roughly meaning 'to persevere in the face of difficulty without complaint')" (Mahmood 2012, 390) is its public declaration, at least in Gilgit. While my interlocutors would not want to give the impression of bragging and would not complain in front of men, they have multiple ways to express their abundant workload or profound pain: by maintaining relentless activity, sighing loudly of exhaustion, or even falling uncomfortably silent. The fact that other women recognize, acknowledge, and admire such deliberate self-sacrifice earns them satisfaction.

My reflections resonate with Abu-Lughod's description of the poetry of the Awlad Ali nomads in Egypt (1986). While some anthropologists interpret her data as indicating that poetry offers women a subversive space in which to express their vulnerability and personal feelings, I would point out that, since women share these lamentations with an audience, they seek public acknowledgment

of how well they endure their hardships. Considering that emotional independence is the highest value among the Awlad Ali, women successfully apply symbolic riddles to demonstrate what the individual overcomes to be an active part of society, thereby enlarging their moral status and respect. Similarly, even though one of my middle-aged hosts had a warm and caring relationship with her mother-in-law, for example, she nevertheless continuously emphasized in our conversations how badly she had been treated in the first years after her wedding. She was made to climb up big walnut trees to harvest the nuts, even when she was in the last trimester of pregnancy. Yet, as she pointed out with a kind of muted pride, she managed to live through all that. Grima ([1992] 2007) reports a similar scheme from her Pakhtun interlocutors, whose stories of self-sacrifice serve not only as source for social respect but also self-worth and confidence. Taking independent actions to alleviate themselves would be counterproductive in this course, so instead they frame their life narratives in the most dramatic words. Cultivating a *habitus* of suffering provides women with a sense of self-esteem, dignity, and identity.

Not every woman implements the norms and values of *parda* in the exact same way. Some are more daring when it comes to pushing boundaries, while others are reluctant to transgress in any way. When girls are caught being deliberately impudent or pert, they frame it as an accident, apologize with a giggle, and hide behind each other's backs or underneath the veil. In this way, they simultaneously express their awareness that their behavior is not in line with conventions of modesty, avoid being scolded, and slightly push the boundary of what is acceptable. According to local epistemology emotions are negotiable. They can be flexibly interpreted by the individual but are regulated through social interaction. As extended stays in Gilgit helped me understand, people grant each other the right to fill their roles in their own manner; as long as dominant social mores, like *parda,* are maintained, individual traits are not criticized. My close acquaintance Shezadi cheerfully teases her immediate relatives and extended female family with frank, sexual innuendo. Since Shezadi does not exhibit such vivacity in front of older men or more distant relatives—let alone do any of the things she likes to tease others about herself—no one seems to mind. If awkward situations arise, other women shrug them off with a smile. The private life of women, as I experienced it, tended to be relatively relaxed and accommodating, with room for effervescence and joviality.

Privacy is not only defined spatially (inside the house or in public), but in regard to the real or potential presence of men. While it is taboo for women to dance at public gatherings,[10] young women at home often play local and Bollywood music on mobile phones and dance together. Indian dramas and films are also popular; however, due to the limited availability of TVs and laptops in the economically relatively poor region, their influence has only recently been increasing through smartphones. Girls also enjoy dressing up, putting on

makeup, and using camera phones to take and pose for photos. Although many young women enthusiastically take selfies in styles set by film stars and TV celebrities, the images are only intended for their own, private enjoyment. Moreover, women of all ages seem very comfortable with their bodies in one another's presence. They frequently tease each other about being too skinny, or having hanging breasts or hairy legs, and they have no reluctance to help each other with their personal hygiene, such as with manicures, pedicures, or eyebrow threading. A warm, caring atmosphere exists among them. While sitting together cooking or lounging around on the cushions on the carpeted floor, they give each other physical comfort by leaning against one another's bodies, massaging each other's heads, and looking for lice.

When women of the extended family were home alone, they frequently exchanged dirty jokes, some of which depended on suggestive gestures to hinting at sexual organs or acts, and they enjoyed teaching me the filthiest words in the local Shina language. One joke, passed on as chain message from phone to phone, became popular for its ridicule of men's thirst for women: "A Pathan [commonly serving as the stereotype of an uneducated, backward scapegoat] met a demon and said: Transform me so that I could suck the blood of young girls! And the demon turned him into an 'Always' [panty liner]. Hahaha!" Even women who had heard the joke before would erupt into laughter when it came up. These gatherings also provide room to discuss sexual matters, such as experiences with unconventional practices, how to increase or decrease the frequency of intercourse with one's husband, or the right way to observe Islamic purification and ablution rules. Such communication and intimacy within women's circles reinforces the awareness of reserve in front of and subservience to men. The relationship between women and men is thus not only produced in their mutual interactions but affirmed by same-sex interfaces.

Vulnerable Honor

When a woman's behavior does lack the required level of restraint, her whole family is affected. Since a person's behavior is depicted "as [a] reflection of group traits rather than the isolable acts of an autonomous individual" (Mandelbaum 1988, 21), family members and relatives identify, and are identified with, a person's misconduct (Barth [1956] 1990; Gratz 2006; Pearl Kaya 2009). Dependence on close kin networks that build the foundation of social organization comes with obligations and responsibilities. Limits of socially acceptable behavior are often associated with the self-motivated and ruthless abandonment of collective interests: a father gambling away his money while his wife and kids are struggling to survive, a woman walking around alone and entering other people's houses, a jobless young man who is too lazy to do grocery shopping for his

mother, a housewife who puts the least required efforts into hospitality but frequently expects others to host her, or a girl who is caught exchanging love letters with a boy in school.

Anthropology has a long history of exploring the link between shame and honor,[11] and scholars still often resort to very similar definitions for both concepts, albeit restricting shame to women and honor to men. Unsurprisingly, life on the ground is more complex. Like *sharm*, which is both publicly performed and privately felt, honor has a double dimension as "the value of a person in his own eyes, but also in the eyes of his society" (Pitt-Rivers 1954, 21). In Pakistan, these different dimensions are captured by the terms *'izzat*, referring to family reputation, which is bound to collective effort and bestowed by the public, and *ghairat*, the self-respect of a man who successfully avoids any personal insecurities. Even without being confronted publicly, individuals are painfully aware of others' thoughts and gossip, particularly insofar as they relate to the perceived level of respect of one man for another. If a man stares at a woman in public, for example, her male companion will be upset not so much because the woman has been insulted, but because the other man flouts his authority. The woman, in the meantime, will feel it is her responsibility to ensure she does not give cause for any escalation of male anger. In other words, honor and its violation have a much stronger relational and emotional basis than rational explanations that simply hold men responsible.

While the discourse about female respectability is omnipresent in and around Gilgit, my interlocutors only brought up honor in relation to rare cases of eloping daughters or unfaithful wives. Precautionary modesty evidently serves its purpose of protecting family honor very well. But the emphasis of women's responsibility for maintaining a family's good standing suggests a strong gender bias. Although both men and women are involved in matters of honor, we should not assume that the dynamic is as simple as men's domination and women's submission. On the contrary, modest reserve demands that wives, daughters, and sisters actively preserve men's reputations. Locals simply refer more frequently to *sharm*, since it concerns more everyday, concrete actions than the more abstract concept of honor (Wikan 1984). While normative expectations vary for women and men, their joint effort is required to maintain a family's position. It is important to note that actual proof of misdemeanor is not required to jeopardize honor. Gossip suffices to damage one's name. In a small society where most people know one another or potentially could, families feel permanently visible, and must stay on constant alert. Both modest respectability and honor generate satisfaction and prestige, as men and women alike contribute to social cohesion (Bourdieu 1965).

In the case of an actual offence against established codes of honor, all others who adhere to social norms express concern. As Nafisa Shah (2017) puts it in a dramatic metaphor about her observations in southern Pakistan, people decide

that rather than risk infection spreading to the whole body, they better amputate an arm. In southern regions of Gilgit-Baltistan, especially in the district of Diamer, disgrace used to be inscribed onto offenders by cutting off their noses (Frembgen 2006) and high rates of blood feuds are reported (Aase 2002; Chaudhary 1998). Such feuds take revenge on a perpetrator's family by killing another, mostly male, member, an act that will then have to be revenged again, starting a spiral of violence. While a man's honor or self-respect is only hurt effectively when he acknowledges the other's offence against him, it is hard to ignore open attacks or acts of provocation. The goal of disciplinary actions is not to achieve additional reputation by exceeding normative expectations, but to quite literally "keep one's face" and avoid any appearance of weaknesses. When a man murders an eloped sister or daughter, an adulterous wife, or, in either scenario, both lovers together, he recovers his own confidence, his social standing, and that of his family.

Backed by Islamic law, and the *Qisas and Diyat Ordinance,* passed in 1990 and only outlawed in 2018, a man who committed a so-called honor killing did not have to fear state persecution. The law had shifted this kind of homicide from being a crime against the state into the private sphere, which meant the victim's family had the right to determine the retaliation (*qiṣāṣ*). If they decided to pardon the murderer, the state dropped further prosecution. The law applied even if the victim's family was custodian and accused at the same time. The legislation had a long history. As Sabine Lentz (1997) reports, the British colonial administration of the Gilgit Agency followed a similar practice for cases of adultery (*zinā)* in the early twentieth century: Because it was socially and morally acceptable for a husband to kill his wife and her paramour, the British opted not to penalize it, in the name of local people's self-governance. Since so-called honor killings are accepted by wide segments of society, the passage of the *Qisas and Diyat Ordinance* was followed by a large rise in crime rates (Knudsen 2004; Patel 2003). The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan reported 860 honor killings in 2015, as well as hundreds of cases of domestic violence against women—the dark figure of unreported cases is surely higher.

In Gilgit-Baltistan, the local online news blog *Pamir Times* stated that more than half of all registered murder cases in 2016—13 out of 23—were related to honor. It regularly features headlines for the areas around Gilgit such as "Double murder. Boy and a girl killed in Jaglote in the name of 'honor,'" "Man and woman shot dead in Oshikandas while 'trying to elope,'" and "Father kills teenage daughter and a young man with an axe in Pari Bangla." These murders should not be seen as direct proof of sexual liaisons. They are often reported to have been committed on the basis of rumors and suspicions.[12] A good friend of mine from Gilgit's suburbs, who disapproves of how often *zinā*-related killings are carried out on the basis of mere suspicion, stunned me by saying that, if he caught his sister red-handed in the throes of an affair, he would also murder her. "When

you witness such a thing, in anger one is capable of anything," he said and added that he considers it his religious duty or service to God (*'ibādat*). Such local sentiments demonstrate the immense value attached to Islamic logic across the region, and the challenges facing politicians and activists who seek to improve women's safety.

Sonia, an adult woman from the countryside close to Gilgit, once jovially explained to me, "I only wear the *dūpaṭa* for religious reasons (*mazhab kī vaja se*)." With a sweeping gesture, she continued, "Otherwise I'd throw it away." It was a daring exclamation, and she followed it with a more contemplative take on the ways that expectations of modest feminine conduct arise from particular social settings, saying, "We also do it for cultural reasons (*culture kī vaja se*). In Islamabad people are also Muslims and they are not so shy. Here people would mind (*burā samajhte hain*) [if we do not observe gender segregation or veiling]." Gilgit is a small place (*choṭā 'ilāqa*) and everyone knows everyone. In most settings in Gilgit-Baltistan even strangers can trace connections between them through their wide networks of relatives, peers at school, workplace colleagues, religious community, or ethnic group, so everyone is always on the lookout for people one might know.

When women meet while walking along the dusty alleyways in the neighborhood around their houses, they hardly stop to talk to each, other but always ask: "Where are you going? (in Shina: *Tu jā beyjenī?*)". No "*Salām 'alaikum*," no "Hello" or "How are you?" Mutual social control manifests itself in this quick check on what the other one is doing and serves as a reminder of one's social limits. By scrutinizing each other's moves, women do not expect to uncover any scandals—a girl eloping would never tell any passers-by where she is really headed—but to give abstract moral concepts tangible form, and to make their maintenance and negotiation omnipresent. Through random meetings in the neighborhood, as well as regular tea circles at friends' and relatives', women keep an excellent overview of the goings-on around them. An adult son once commented on the gathering of information by his mother: "Walking from house to house she collects stories and stores all the *data* in her brain. When it is night and all the family members come back home, she gets started like a *news channel*."

Gossip is omnipresent in Gilgit, and events are readily inflated. Talk about others literally translates as "making up things" (*bāten banana*) in Gilgiti slang. One of my older "brothers" warned me about the problem of exaggeration: "When I hissed at you just now, an observer might have interpreted it as me saying 'be quiet' but when the news reaches the *chowk* [central point in the neighborhood] the account will already include three swearwords (*gālīān*). And a little later, people will say I slapped you." I learned to evaluate locals' stories critically. Their accounts of how many girls elope with their mobile phone boyfriends or have sexual relationships before marriage tended to deviate from my empirical

evidence. The gulf appears to be especially wide in the urban areas where people from different origins live close together, each trying to trump the others in terms of respectability. Gossip in the countryside, where everyone is related, is less common, as it risks negatively reflecting on one's own family.

Gilgiti women improvise social etiquette for new technologies, such as cell phones, on the basis of their intrinsic sense of *sharm*. They, for example, do not answer incoming calls from unknown numbers, just as that they would not chat with a passing stranger in public. Moreover, the distribution of mobile phones is clearly gendered: Girls usually do not get a mobile phone until their wedding or engagement, when it is often given to them by their future husband to communicate with him. Only young women who study at university, live in hostels, or work outside the house possess their own phones before they are married, so that they are able to keep in touch with their families while out in public on their own—a troika of freedom, security, and "digital leash."[13] The ubiquity of phone connections sometimes serves as control mechanism to check, not only on one's children, but also on one's spouse. Men especially express frustration at their constant availability, as they had previously been used to wandering around outside the house without constraints. Mothers, fathers, and wives can now call places they would physically never go to and intrude into time with friends, request that family members come home, or give them tasks to do. An incapacitated mobile phone raises the utmost suspicion, but if that conceals misconduct, or even a premarital relationship, a phone glitch is safer than the risk of exposure.

Talking about mobile phone communication, many use the English word "*trust*" to appease the potential threats of invisible connections that elude observation: "My parents *trust* me. They don't question what I do or check my mobile." The prevalence of this foreign term in an Urdu sentence points to the novelty of the concept: In a region where communication until lately was based on face-to-face interaction and mutual surveillance in joint-family living arrangements, the focus on the individual provides room for rumors. To trust each other becomes necessary when someone is alone in a place, on the way to work, at home, or independently navigating mobile phone connections. A middle-aged married woman explained in an interview why her husband has to believe in her righteous character: "Look, during the day I'm here alone. [My] husband does not know whom I talk to, who I invite. It depends on yourself. If I'm not bad, it's fine. If I was bad, I would misuse [the mobile phone]. I'm alone all day, how should others know? What could they do? The phone is in my hand, others have no idea [what I do with it]."

But because she is not "bad," she suggests, she can be trusted to behave appropriately. Note how her line of thought conflates the interior feelings and outside behavior of a person: *Sharm* as an integral part of her character stands for a complete dissolution of the body-mind divide. Many young women

repeatedly emphasized to me that they too are to be "trusted." They stake their identity and pride on being exemplary women, even when their own definitions of modesty vary from those of their parents (Walter forthcoming).

It is impossible to disentangle women's internal feelings of *sharm* from the outside pressure women face to be modest and respectable, and the two aspects mutually enhance each other. While my friend Sonia joked that she would throw away her *dūpaṭa* if Allah Himself had not demanded women to cover themselves, she later admitted that she felt "ashamed" when she sat with her long-desired, newlywed husband without a veil around her upper body for the first time. She could not overcome embodied dimensions of modesty, even in a setting where it was completely acceptable to discard them, with one's own husband in private. Being, feeling, or considering someone as respectable serves as a good demonstration of how emotions do not exist as independent states, but are established among people and as outcome of countless factors interacting. While women and men in Gilgit-Baltistan uphold standards of feeling and behaving, they are also confronted with and incorporate new aspects into the local framework, and therefore shift established norms, however slightly, from inside.

3

Arranging Affection

The majority of women in Gilgit-Baltistan live in conventional heteronormative marriages, arranged—as is typical throughout South Asia—by the parents of the couple. Instead of pitting "arranged" versus "love," this is simply what marriage (*shādī*) is, and only cases deviating from this practice need special description, such as eloping (*bhāgnā*). Since transnational trends of Islamic revivalism and South Asian traditions both frame emotions as irrational and as having agency over people, married couples would not qualify as love-stricken, but most marriages are characterized by loving ties among family members. When someone explains that "there is a lot of *moḥabbat* in the house," they refer to attachment and affection among close kin, both consanguineal and affinal, and the expression for "I love you" in Shina, "*Mas tuṭ khush thamis*," literally translates as "I'm happy with you." Many of my interlocutors equated this happiness of *khush* with the Urdu term for love, *moḥabbat*, the more widespread concept of love, for both lovers as well as family members. Despite this gloss over, the marital relationship certainly takes on different qualities than others.

Conjugal intimacy emerges through what Ring usefully calls a "labor of attachment" (Ring 2006, 138) in which women actively pursue warmth, solidarity, affection, and the comfort of "tenderness" (146) with their husbands. Wives are interested in getting along well with their spouses and aim to forge loving bonds to mitigate the influence of a mother-in-law and ensure a husband's support. Although married women publicly keep a distance from their husbands, reflecting their embodied modesty and maintaining a gendered balance within the joint family, it is socially accepted—even expected—that couples develop mutual affection. Ring does not go into detail about how such sentiments manifest but as I learned during my work in Gilgit and its environs, women labor to attach in a variety of ways. My interlocutors showed me that a wife's dedication typically does not go as far as bending over backwards to gain a husband's

admiration; such emotional codependency would make her vulnerable. At the same time, women do pursue loyal and even loving relationships. They value and test their husband's commitment and find ways to mobilize men's sense of obligation to take care for them. Despite women's efforts to ward off the assumption of their emotional "weakness," feelings play an important role in initiating either closeness and sociality or aversion and isolation.

So, while love between spouses is not a precondition for the wedding, an arranged marriage is not meant to be devoid of love. Affection just develops at a different point, and in different ways, than in the Western model whereby romantic passion leads to marriage and not the other way around. Even though young spouses in Gilgit might not be entirely happy with their parents' choice, they are usually not forced into marriage, but instead trust that they should consent to a match that is heartily approved by the whole family. In a community oriented around kinship networks, happiness derives from the bigger picture rather than from a single relationship. My friend Seema, who shared her perspective, described it with Islamic rhetoric of passive but willing compliance to God's will: "We believe that the destiny (*qismat*) that Allah has written will come true. But we also believe that when we pray to Allah, He will change our destiny. These are two types of destiny. If you are in love with someone and want to marry him, but because of some problems your wedding takes place with someone else, then it was a message from Allah." God determines one's fate, but human beings can still decide how to deal with given circumstances, transforming their situation accordingly. Individuals manage to consolidate ideas of personal sovereignty and collective interdependence within Islamic beliefs in destiny and submission to God's will. Drawing on destiny as emic concept allows us to understand how people accommodate forces that are beyond individuals' control or even rational understanding. As Laura Menin (2015) puts it for her findings from Morocco, instead of passive submission, "it is precisely in the unresolved tensions between acting and being acted upon that the possibility of human freedom and choice resides" (906).

Most of my close acquaintances in the area of Gilgit succeeded in mastering their own lives in ways that allowed them to develop close and affectionate ties, or even mutually fell in love with their spouses, either after their *shādī*, or, for younger women, after their initially arranged *nikāḥ*. Drawing on biographical accounts of women from Gilgit and surrounding areas, observations from my fieldwork, and relevant ethnographic examples from India, I will now tease out some of the characteristics that make for more or less affectionate conjugal relationships. After outlining factors that lead to an arrangement of a match, I will look at the years of joint effort and concessions that allow spouses to grow together, and then offer a glimpse at couples' sexual lives to delineate the unique quality of marital intimacy. The chapter closes with a detailed ethnographic example from a relationship that did not work out.

Matchmaking

Marriage lies at the core of Muslim life. Prophet Muhammad recommended people marry to channel sexuality safely and productively. Contemporary interpretations found in marriage advice manuals also stress that marriage is not just associated with religious devotion, but that conjugal intimacy brings a quality of inner peace (*skūn*) and contentment (Rosenbaum 2017). Across South Asia, marriages create kinship alliances, and anyone who abdicates from the system threatens the family's stability, continuity, and reputation. Parents see it as their obligation, duty, and desire to facilitate their children's marriages.[1]

In the area of Gilgit, the active party in the process of matchmaking is the boy's family, and though both his parents must come to an agreement together, his mother tends to take the lead—one of the most influential domains of women. Over visits with relatives and at large social gatherings like weddings, a mother searching a wife for her son keeps her eyes and ears open for potential daughters-in-law who will be helpful in the household and compatible with existing family dynamics. Until the 1990s, marriage was proposed very early in a girl's adolescence, when her personal abilities and looks were not necessarily settled. Therefore, her potential in-laws judged her suitability by evaluating her parents and their household. If her parents were headstrong "quarrelers" (*ghussa vāle*), or lazy idlers (*kām chōr*), she might bring such disruptive traits into the family. These criteria still matter, but now that the potential couple is likely to be in their twenties by the time their marriage is arranged, parents can also devote more focus on the potential couple's characters' compatibility. The children's wellbeing always mattered, but while it used to be of stronger interest to match a girl with the household's same-sex peers, today the personal relationship of husband and wife is at least as important.

Appearance can be a factor too. When one of my middle-aged friends from the countryside started receiving the first proposals for her fourteen-year-old daughter's hand, she casually commented about the potential husbands: "What does the face tell you?" Other women told me that beautiful girls are more popular and receive more proposals than plainer ones. The most dominant standard of beauty in the area of Gilgit, just like everywhere else throughout South Asia, is fair skin. For girls, the criteria also include: a tall, slim (but not fragile) body; big breasts; a cheerful, blooming face with big eyes, a long nose, and thin lips; long hair; and, clean skin and nails—because hands and feet are visible at all times, get dirty from work in the kitchen, dusty courtyards, and fields, and they are taken as sign of how well a girl cares for herself. However, my interlocutors acknowledged that even a less attractive woman from a prestigious family would be highly desirable to parents. Virtues, achievements, reputation, and status, as well as complementary familial and domestic politics, are more important to potential in-laws than looks.

Education has become more significant on the marriage market in recent years, as an indicator of a family's economic background, a guarantor of a financially secure future, and a sign of likely spousal compatibility. A man's educational achievements and subsequent earning potential are more closely scrutinized than a woman's, but a wife's college degree signifies her family's "modern" stance on education and might later be an asset to acquire teaching jobs and contribute to the household's income. A few very ambitious families in the city of Gilgit draw attention to their daughters' degrees to help her marry a successful businessman, doctor, or government employee on the "outside" (*bāhar*). "Outside of the family" here does not generally mean someone from completely unknown social circles, but more likely means a marriage between two people who are strangers to each other but whose families can reconstruct some distant kinship connection. I have never come across a family in Gilgit-Baltistan that avails itself of the professional online matching-services that have become very popular in India (Titzmann 2015). For both parties, the most reliable indicator of a successful marriage arrangement is the compatibility of two families from a similar background. When potential spouses are not related by kinship, they ideally come from families with equal social standing and a similar family culture—that is, they are "people like us" (Fischer and Lyon 2000, 313).

Older ethnographic sources (Biddulph [1880] 1971; Snoy 1975) suggest that families in the area of Gilgit used to practice exogamy before Islam gained influence in daily life. This means marriage with a patrilineal relative was prohibited, but girls could be "given" to relatives on the mother's side who were not considered to be part of one's own family clan, as long as they stayed within the same *qōm*. Over the past century, the increasing propagation of Islamic ideas has made marriage between cousins on either side of the family more popular. When I composed an extensive family tree that included 362 people covering six generations of a family in Gilgit's rural outskirts, the results confirmed these patterns. Until recently, women seemed to have a preference for marrying their daughters to men in their natal villages. That is where they themselves would have felt comfortable, where they wanted to strengthen family bonds, and where they could be sure of a support network for their daughters. Today, there is no definitive structural trend discernible. My mostly Shia interlocutors in the district of Gilgit often married relatives of second or third degree from both sides of the families. While descendance clearly follows patrilineal and residence patri- or virilocal rules, kinship relationships are practiced as cognate-bilateral: Within the same generation, the classificatory kinship terminology of *kākā* or *kākī* (Shina for brother or sister) does not distinguish between maternal or paternal cousins. Ties to the mother's relatives might be less intensive because of residential patterns, but they are no less important when considering marriage arrangements.

Families see marriage to close kin as a form of risk reduction. The potential spouses might already feel comfortable with certain relatives and their



FIGURE 8 Couple exchanging rings at their wedding.
Photo by the author.

households, and parents feel more confident about their children's security, especially with regard to their daughters. The girl will live in a similar environment to her natal home, among social equals, and her family need not expect unpleasant surprises from households they already know well. Such dynamics are true for transnational Pakistani marriages (Shaw and Charsley 2006), as well as for remote valleys in Gilgit-Baltistan. Mutual family ties facilitate reciprocal visits and, most importantly, allow a bride's family to pressure their relatives in case of the daughter's unhappiness. In other words, marrying kin can be an insurance mechanism against abuse. I witnessed several families with double relations: two sisters marrying into the same household, or a sister and brother from one family marrying a brother and sister in another (referred to as *waṭa-saṭa* in mainland Pakistan). Such arrangements bind families together, limit mistreatment, and create a check on the self-interest of the spouses: Any infractions, from laziness or backtalk to adultery, might have negative consequences for one's sibling. A marriage agreement concerns two families, not merely two individuals.

One of my "aunts" in Gilgit was baffled by the inattention to kinship in German marriages. Repeatedly, she enquired about the motivations and nature of marital relationships in my home country, only to shake her head in disbelief, and express her pity for everyone involved, certain that their families would eventually disintegrate. Pakistanis are by no means alone in prioritizing

extended family life in marital decisions. Donner (2016) writes that in Kolkata, her young interlocutors live in and support patrilocal joint family living arrangements, and see their family responsibilities and securities as part of what it means to be "Indian." Jyothsna Belliappa (2013) sees it from a more practical angle: Although many of her female interlocutors who pursue careers in Bangalore's IT industry cherish the nuclear family ideal, the need for help with childcare integrates them into the husband's family. While a few young women in Gilgit told me they would prefer to marry a single man without dependent siblings or parents to support, many others embraced extended family living patterns. Larger households allow relatives, and particularly women, to help one another. And even families who live alone end up hosting relatives from near and far who visit frequently; if the household is in "downcountry" Pakistan, family members may even stay for longer durations, for example, to escape the cold winter in the mountains or to pursue their university studies.

To protect newly linked families from extravagant financial demands, young people are coupled with an eye to maintaining relative socio-economic parity. The exchange of money, whether as dowries or wedding gifts, helps secure relationships between the families. Distinct from Christian or Hindu conceptions of a sacred, God-sanctioned bond, prevalent Islamic jurisdictions see marriage as a dissolvable contract to transfer a woman's sexual and reproductive functions in exchange for protection and/or maintenance (Rosenbaum 2017). In the Gilgit area, until the second half of the twentieth century the groom's family paid a bride wealth or bride price (*jab* in Shina) to "purchase" a woman. As Brahmin and Islamic criticism of the practice spread across South Asia, bride price ceased to be common, and in 1963 the *Muslim Personal Law Act* outlawed it altogether for Pakistan. As Gilgit-Baltistan was not a formal part of the country at this time, Pakistani laws did not apply, and the custom carried on until it was eventually discredited as un-Islamic in the 1980s (Lentz 2000). But the groom's family, nevertheless, has a religious obligation to give the bride herself a monetary gift or security in form of the *mehr.* As mandatory requirement of any Islamic marriage contract, it has taken an increasingly central role since the 1960s (Snoy 1975). Among Gilgit's Shia, financial negotiations, however, tend not to be part of the matchmaking process, and instead come up when organizing the actual wedding celebrations or within the ceremony itself. When asked to suggest a *mehr,* most women quote a relatively small amount, between 5,000 and 15,000 Pakistani rupees (approximately equivalent to thirty-seven to 111 euros in mid-2014), with the assumption that it is a symbolic way to fulfill the marriage contract. They never actually demand or receive it from their husbands.

During the last decades, the pressure has shifted from the groom's parents onto the bride's, who are expected to send their daughters off into marriage with their own property as a dowry or *jehez* (often just referred to as *sāmān*, "things"). In Gilgit, dowries today range from clothes, cosmetics, silver rings, and metal

bangles to gold jewelry, hot water boilers, refrigerators, washing machines, and wooden furniture. In other parts of South Asia, dowries can be part of the matchmaking considerations and turn into a competition for prestige, but not so much in Gilgit-Baltistan. As one young man explained it to me, "Here, all people are humble (*halke*)," and dowries play a negligible role in wedding negotiations. The combined value of my interlocutors' dowry gifts was usually between 50,000 and 200,000 rupees (respectively, 370 to 1,482 euros at the exchange rate in mid-2014). These gifts are mostly framed not as an offering to the groom's family, but as part of the bride's family inheritance. Although daughters are legally entitled to half of their brothers' inheritance, the majority of her family's property will go to her brothers and only a handful of women end up with their own land, like a small field or an orchard. Instead, most are content with other forms of ongoing family support that will give them stronger leverage in their marriage, such as a dowry, regular visits, and continued gifts. If a family does not have the means to provide the whole dowry at once, they will deliver various things to their daughter's over the first years of her marriage, a practice that clearly demonstrates their continuing support for her and reminds her in-laws of their mutual obligation to take care of the woman. Furthermore, reciprocal gifts and invitations secure ongoing relationships between the two sides. Where wedding celebrations themselves are concerned, costs are distributed among both families, with each paying for their own party. And since today's weddings take place later than they used to, families have more time to budget and prepare.

Gilgiti brides are now between sixteen years of age and their mid-twenties at the time of their *nikāḥ* and mostly in their twenties for their *shādī*; grooms are generally some years older. In the 1990s, girls tended to marry between the ages of twelve and sixteen[2]; whether she had gone through puberty was irrelevant. The older women I spoke with often described themselves as having been so young at the time of their *nikāḥ* that they did not fully understand what was going on (Shina: *khacī mulā'ī*). As one put it: "At night my father told me that he had given me to a man in *nikāḥ* today. I did not know about *nikāḥs* back then, what they were, how and why they took place. I had even called the neighbors for a celebration in our house myself, without knowing it was for me. It all seemed like a game. And later on, I forgot that I'm married altogether." The earlier system was tough on grooms as well. Those who were older or better educated might have established a certain measure of independence, but still had to subordinate their preferences to those of their parents. Some middle-aged and elderly men told me they had tried to convey their wishes to their families, but were hushed by their mothers, who did not want to surrender their right to pick a suitable daughter-in-law. The case of a grandfather in a valley close to Gilgit was especially relentless: When he was just a teenager, his older brother suddenly passed away and he had to marry his sister-in-law, his brother's widow—an old custom already reported for the region in the nineteenth century (Biddulph

[1880] 1971). So suddenly the young man found himself with a wife roughly fifteen years older than him and three children, the firstborn almost as old as he was. His grown-up grandchildren now pity his case as a rare example of a forced marriage (*zaberdasti shādī*).

In April 2019, in an amendment to the *Child Marriage Restraint Act,* the Pakistani Senate raised the legal age for brides from sixteen to eighteen years. Conservative religious groups criticized the law, because under Islam entering into puberty—not attaining a numeric age—signals maturity. Future studies need to show to what extent the law will be enforced. When I was in Gilgit-Baltistan, girls in rural areas especially still consented to their *nikāḥ* before they were eighteen years old, and no one seemed much concerned. But the majority of my interlocutors emphasized that by the time of *shādī,* when the marriage is consummated, brides tend to be much older, and that mental maturity is nowadays understood to be essential for a girl's consent. Most men and women see this as a welcome change.

Ambiguous Liminality

Over the last decades, the practice of engagements (*manganī*) has slowly spread from the Pakistani Punjab to Gilgit-Baltistan. As Gratz (2006) reported from her fieldwork in the 1990s, none of the sects had yet adopted it by then and even today engagements are mostly not celebrated with big functions, but only serve to mark the marriage agreement. Because engagements do not have religious validation or legal consequences, many locals are aware of their fragility. A couple is only understood to be bound together securely with the marriage contract signed at the *nikāḥ.* From the Islamic point of view, the *nikāḥ* is *the* legal marriage, but among the Shia community in the area of Gilgit, it has historically functioned, and still often does, to secure a good match; years may pass before it is followed by the social wedding of the *shādī*, when the marriage is fully implemented. Anthropologists have documented similar patterns in Muslim communities across South Asia (Akhtar 2015; Mody 2008; Olszewska 2015). In her ethnography on the Durani of northwestern Afghanistan, for example, Tapper (1991), describes a phase between *nikāḥ* as customary engagement and the actual wedding celebrations of the *shādī*, characterized by the "romance and excitement" (163) of first interactions and sexual relations. While the majority of Muslims sign the marriage contract and hold the ceremony simultaneously, a few communities, or sometimes even only individual families, create an interim period lasting years between when the legal marriage contract, which secures the wedding arrangements, is signed and when the couple actually lives together.

In Gilgit-Baltistan, couples were traditionally not permitted to meet one another until the marriage was socially validated at the *shādī* where the public wedding celebrations serve to confirm the status of the couple as married (cf.

Mody 2008). Until the late 1990s, contact between spouses was completely discouraged, especially from the girl's side. The young husband could visit his wife's family, but she would hide from him bashfully, even escape to the neighbors' house, when he was present. A middle-aged woman described how shy she and her peers felt in these situations: "Forget about talking. We didn't even show our face. The normal custom (*'am rivāj*) was that the girl ran off (*bhāg jātī thī*) when the husband came for a visit; she went into the other room or left the house altogether. In those old times, we were far from conversing with each other." Besides this high level of embodied modesty, older women kept a rigid regime of surveillance on a young bride's conduct and enforced established norms: "Our grandmother was very strict. She called us sluts (*kanjr*) if we were curious to peek at our husbands through the window. She thought one gets pregnant through touch (*hāth lagāne se*). Grandma did not know that one can also just sit together peacefully; she thought we would directly start 'work' [i.e., sex]." While the grandmother in question was surely aware of the difference between different forms of physical intimacy and a couple spending time together in front of others, the clear association of a marital relationship with sexuality reflects the nature of conjugality in older times: Wife and husband mainly saw each other at night; a marriage was not characterized by talkative friendship but by producing offspring. Moreover, people assumed that the less a couple knows one another, the better their marriage will be—possibly a dictum that secures the mother-in-law's power, since talking to each other would intensify the bond between future wife and husband.

Over the last few decades, the nature of couples' interactions before *shādī* has been subject to intensive negotiations and changes, but brides still avoid entering the groom's house. The period between *nikāḥ* and *shādī* remains an extended, liminal phase, a transition from childhood to adult life, or as Gratz terms it, a "prolonged adolescence" (2006, 338, translation by the author). It is the time in which girls grow up, and in which young men finish their studies, return to their parents' farms, or find jobs. But it is not without challenges to the young couple, especially to girls. Young women are often afflicted with ambivalent feelings between "repulsion and attraction" (Gratz 2006, 427, translation by the author), torn between sadness that they will soon depart from their family, anger at parents for giving them away, interest in their future spouse, and visions of their married lives. As the *shādī* approaches, rules of avoidance are often slightly relaxed, and brides are sometimes encouraged by their mothers or fathers to greet their husband from a distance or serve him tea. In this way, they can achieve at least a small degree of comfort with their soon-to-be-full husbands.

Even so, girls often perceive their husbands as threats who will pull them away from their families. Women described leaving their natal families at the time of *shādī* as among the most dramatic events in their lives. My friend Naila,

for example, could not stop crying on her wedding day (*rukhṣat).* While she was looking forward to finally living with her husband, she explained, "I just feel so sad. Everything is going to change, and I don't know how it will be with auntie [mother-in-law]. Tomorrow I will be happy but now, oh Maria *bājī* (big sister), it's so painful." The bride knows her life will change completely. She not only loses the daily companions of her parental household and neighborhood, but she also faces the pressures of an increased domestic workload, high expectations from her in-laws, and the sexual desires of her husband.

One of my host sisters in another family, Shazia, was only thirteen years old when, in the early 1990s, she was married to a man ten years her senior. Shazia grew up in a valley close to Gilgit, where her father was not only the head of a small village (*lambadār*) but also one of the first university-educated men in the valley who quickly made a career as school teacher; people admired his modernity and prosperity. Shazia's mother, a hard-working farmer, had abilities that locals prized too: She taught her children how to assist with crops, cattle maintenance, food preservation, and household chores. Small wonder, then, that Shazia's parents began receiving wedding proposals for her when she was very young, around nine or ten years old. Shazia's mother showed great interest in a candidate her favorite brother suggested. Altaf, the young man in question, was a distant relative from Shazia's mother's natal village, and she liked the idea of strengthening ties there. He seemed to be a very ambitious student pursuing further education in Karachi. His mother had passed years ago, and his father was aging, so Altaf would be responsible for his four younger siblings. Shazia's father was reluctant, but her mother convinced him to at least meet Altaf.

The next hurdle was Altaf himself, who initially vetoed the match when he heard how young Shazia was. But her mother convinced Altaf to come over for a visit, so he could look Shazia over. Shazia remembers being around twelve years old, with uncommonly mature physical features for her age. Her mother directed her to make tea for Altaf, but because she was too shy to encounter him, she sent her younger sister to serve it to her parents and the guest. He stayed the night with relatives in the neighborhood and managed to get a glimpse of her the next day, walking by Shazia's house as she sat on the veranda preoccupied with some housework and off guard. Shazia assumed he was one of her countless distant cousins and addressed Altaf as "*kākā*" (older brother) in a common greeting. Surprised by the amusement on his face, she realized who he was and ran into the house to take cover. When she peeked through one of the screened windows, she remembered having encountered him during an incident in her childhood.

When Shazia was about nine years old and was visiting relatives in a distant village, she had fallen off a ladder while climbing down from a roof; she had lost consciousness. Altaf, a teenager back then, had been passing by and he volunteered to carry her back to her parents' house. The walk must have taken at least two hours. Shortly before reaching her home, Shazia remembers waking

up, seeing this unknown boy, and experiencing a strange feeling ("*Mujhe 'ajīb sā meḥsūs hū'ī hai*"). Looking out the window three years later, she said, she knew he was the one. Shazia's memories are likely influenced by the fact that she went on to marry and fall in love with Altaf: she can look back on that childhood memory as a prophetic moment. But at the time of her engagement, family politics were not as romantic and she is aware she had no say in the matter: "No one has ever asked me, neither mother nor father. I only listened to their talk." However, about a year later, the families agreed to the match, and a *nikāḥ* secured the marriage of Shazia and Altaf.

At the time, Altaf was studying to become a high-school teacher. He had already graduated from a *madrasa* (religious school), where he earned the title of *sheikh*, a spiritual leader. Following the Islamic logic that the *nikāḥ* was the legal marriage, he demanded that he be allowed to interact with his wife when he returned home to the valley for his holidays. "Altaf's mind-set was a *madrasa* one (*Altaf kā zehen madrasa vālā thā*)," Shazia explained. She was trapped in the difficult situation of owing obedience to her new husband, with his revolutionary views, and to her parents, who maintained the customary line that spouses should keep their distance before the *shādī*. She remembers her dilemma: "When he returned to the valley after a year, problems increased. I really liked him by that time and for him it was very difficult to be without me anymore. I could not find peace (*skūn*) knowing that he was frustrated with me [for avoiding him]. So, one day, I wrote a letter. When he came for a visit at my parents' I indicated that I left something on the windowsill. He went there, read it, and left an answer. This is how our communication (*guftagū*) started." While this limited interaction through their "postal service," as they called it, came as a great relief to the young couple, Shazia's family did not approve of such secretive behavior. Her father's younger brother twice caught her when she was secretly writing her letters in a distant corner of their extensive gardens and sending them through her younger sister. Altaf responded by angrily arguing with Shazia's uncle. Overcome with stress, or *tension*, the English term used in local parlance, Shazia became seriously ill, and eventually fell unconscious (*behōsh*).

When she could not be revived through injections by a health worker in the village, Altaf organized a jeep for her transport to the central hospital in Gilgit. On the way, Shazia says, her mother heard her making strange noises. It was, she said, "as if I had gone mad (*pāgal*)." For nine days she had to stay in the hospital until her condition stabilized. During that time, she was not in control of her own body, and never opened her eyes. She wet her bed, and had to be fed by her mother. When she came out of her despair, Shazia had made a decision and asked her family to organize her *shādī* with Altaf. Speaking of her parents, she says, "I did not want to live with them anymore. I was very angry at them." Though Altaf had sworn to stay at a distance from her so as to not cause any more pain, she wanted to resolve this emotional limbo. Shazia's father did not

want to comply with her wish. He said she was still too young, only about fifteen at the time. What's more, Altaf had just finished his studies, did not have a job yet, and lived in an old and decrepit mud house with family members who depended on him. When Shazia's father finally consented to their *shādī*, he made his continued disapproval clear, and did not provide much in the way of a dower. It was a breach in family relations, and though those ties have been restored, Shazia still remembers how disappointed she was in her father for not having helped her to settle down.

Shazia's affliction seems to fall within a pattern. Other women I spoke with had similar experiences, remembering the liminal phase between childhood and married life as a time of such intense pressure, when forces bigger than them made them physically sick. While men's lives are characterized by stability, young women have to make and unmake relationships at the time of their wedding. They must get used to new family members, and reduce, though not altogether break, connections to their natal family and friends. In preparation for this process, many girls begin to distance themselves from their families before their departure, to make the transition bearable (Lamb 1997). This may have been what led Shazia, however unconsciously, to plunge into a "madness." But she tells the story with implicit pride. In Shazia's narration, she was overcome not with fear but with conjugal loyalty, even love. By demanding a quick *shādī*, she managed to regather herself and actively exerted influence on her wellbeing. Her parents may have arranged the marriage, but in her version of the story, she found a way to take her life into her own hands.

Adjusting Oneself and Growing Together

When the bride moves into the groom's house, she has to accommodate not only her new family but also her husband, with whom, at least until the last few decades, she would be mostly unfamiliar. A woman in her seventies—surrounded by numerous grandchildren, other young women, and me—recalled how difficult it was to get used to life with her husband:

> I was so young and didn't know my husband or his family. When they [the in-laws] brought me to their house, I was very shy and afraid of them. When my husband came close to me, I tried to hide because I didn't understand why he wanted to "sit" with me. I stayed completely silent and didn't talk. We were so *shermātī* back then that we didn't talk to boys. Because I didn't say a word for twelve days, my husband understood that I was too young. That was a very good trait (*'adat*) of his, he didn't pressure. Then, one day I heard my mother-in-law say to him: "This way she will never like you, you have to talk to her, make a joke." Slowly, slowly my shyness subsided (*sharm gīā*) but I was still intact (*ṭhīk*).



FIGURE 9 Women stopping by during daily tasks.
Photo by the author.

She went on to provide a blunt account of losing her virginity before she had even had her first period. Appalled at the hardship (*taklīf*) she had to endure in the early years of her marriage, her audience gasped. But she was clear that these experiences had not had a lasting effect on her relationship with her husband and explained to her grandchildren that he, too, was merely trying to meet his family's expectations and depended on a distribution of labor. When one of my middle-aged friends described the immense workload she suffered at her in-laws' house, she defended her husband in similar terms: "In those times, the husband could not say anything against his mother and father, like: 'Don't scold her, don't pressure her.' Nowadays, husbands ask their parents not to demand too much work from their wife, especially when she is pregnant. Back then, the husband also thought that his wife only came as a laborer." Many Gilgiti mothers prepare their daughters for married life with a focus on the relationship, not with their husbands, but with their mothers-in-law, whom they should respect and with whom they will work side by side (Gratz 2006); the more eagerly they perform their tasks the more respect they earn for their natal family.

Mothers-in-law, for their part, know that the younger a bride, the more quickly she can adapt. The mother-in-law works, writes Katherine Ewing (1991) about Pakistani women, to "have the proper control of and authority over her daughter-in-law, which is required in order to train her in the ways of her new family" (140), something she has difficulty accomplishing once wife and husband

have bonded and might plot against her. This adaptation process may not seem compassionate, but among Gilgiti families a "pole change" (Gratz 2006, 523, translated by the author) of the new arrival is considered inevitable to maintain one's own household culture. Moreover, the bride endures exhaustion and misery in order to become a strong and mature woman. Older women recount the adversities they bore as young wives with pride and even enjoy shocking younger generations with accounts of their deprivations: hard labor, emotional and physical suffering, often illustrated by the numbers of children, lost either in pregnancy or as infants who perished from spring hunger or winter pneumonia.

While today most women in the area of Gilgit are older when they marry, they are still kept extremely busy at their new home. They are expected to do housework, take care of any small children in the household, and may also maintain a garden, work in the fields, or milk a cow twice a day. As Grima's ([1992] 2007) Pakhtun collaborators report, and as women in Gilgit's suburb told Sarah Halvorson (2011), married women grieve the loss of relative autonomy and the leisure of their girlhood days, and experience pregnancy, parenting, and domestic responsibilities in their in-laws' house as a set of burdens. Constant occupation and exhaustion make it hard for young wives to keep up friendships or extensive contact with their original families. So, when women portray their lives, they often frame them with the term *majbūrī*, meaning being compelled to or bound to (do) something, and place high value on their abilities to endure and tolerate suffering. The salient feature of arranged marriage as they experience it, then, is not a lack of love or affection, but their own effort to adjust to difficult circumstances and the willingness to persevere. These values of successfully going through hardships and adjusting to one's situation transpire in Shazia's account. But the initial struggles in marriage with Altaf also demonstrate a woman's efforts to win her husband's support.

Sipping salty milk tea and snacking on delicious home-made potato fries, Shazia told me that though she had worked hard to convince her parents to consent to her *shādī*, she was overwhelmed by what married life ended up entailing. Isolated from her family, alienated by a new social environment, and overburdened with work as the only adult woman in her new household, Shazia felt the growing wish to escape her situation. From a brief visit to her parents' house, she brought poison meant for fleas and other bugs with her. A few days later, she dissolved it in a glass of water and started writing a farewell letter, sobbing heavily. The moment Altaf came home, he realized what was happening, took the glass from her hand, and smashed it on the ground. She reacted with outrage. "I abused him and called him names (*gālīān*). I told him he hadn't believed me when I complained about of the horrors at home and that I wanted to die." Then she went on hunger strike for 48 hours. Altaf was devastated and cried a lot, Shazia remembers. But he found a way to resolve the conflict and commanded all members of the household to swear on the Qur'an to treat

Shazia better and help her with her chores in the future. For Shazia this was a pivotal episode: "From then on, Altaf has started taking my side. His efforts gradually reduced my anger and, by the time our first child was born a few months later, I had completely forgotten about the fight."

Shazia's success story is not an isolated example. In a detailed analysis of magazine advice and short stories in India, Amita Tyagi Singh and Patricia Uberoi (1994) identify exactly this trope of endurance and compromise as the "thorny path to the ultimate 'happy ending' [of arranged marriages]" (101). The magazines conjure women's "moral superiority" (106) that will help them to overcome struggles with in-laws or other anxieties, insecurities, and vulnerabilities by overlooking others' faults, adjusting their own ambitions, making compromises, or simply working harder. Since women have more to lose from dysfunctional relationships than men, they need to put more effort into the success of their marriage and will eventually be rewarded with "marital bliss" (101), family harmony, and personal happiness.

During my fieldwork, older women would repeatedly emphasize that circumstances for new brides have improved over the last years, such that young wives today only do the work they want to do ("*Vo apnī marẓī se kām kartī hain*"). Some of these older women expressed regret that they had not fought for better conditions when they were in the same position. Having grown used to their husbands, they usually did not complain about their parents' choice of partner, but they regretted having been married before they had outgrown their own naïve ignorance. The younger generation of wives may enter into marriages with more knowledge of their husbands, but many told me that they still felt surveilled by their mothers-in-law when trying to learn the ways of her new home. A thirty-year-old woman who got married in a village described the situation after three years of matrimony as follows: "It's not the same easy feeling at the in-laws' house as at home. In one's own family one can do whatever one wants. Also, work is not such a big problem. If there are fights, they are not so problematic with one's mother's people (*ammī log*). But I fear my mother-in-law. Not because she is so cruel but that she would talk [to others] about me when I make dinner too late or break something; then people would think that I'm dodging work (*kām cor hūn*)."

Grima ([1992] 2007) describes such dynamics as core to a structure of matriarchal gerontocracy, in which older women empower themselves by dominating younger women. Denying a new wife's autonomy and initiative lets the older women in the household defend or even improve upon their own status. As my interlocutor continued, "It's always the women who fight. Problems mostly arise with the mother-in-law, only in rare cases with the father-in-law. And daily nagging occurs with the husband's younger sisters (*nanden*) or other brother's wives if they live in the same house. With younger brothers of the husband (*devar*) there are never fights. Women have to take care of the house together, so they get into arguments over work. Men don't get involved in such little things." A

new bride must submit to the internal pecking order. Moreover, she may be identified as a potential threat who could share family secrets with the outside world. A young husband explained to me that, "naturally," his wife is still more loyal and attached to her natal home. This aroused not sympathy, but suspicion: Instead of visiting her parents' house, he said, she needs to distance herself and shift her focus: "This is her house now."

As she copes with these struggles, a wife proves her place in her new family, exhibits qualities of self-control, and earns her husband's admiration. Over the years, the early tension starts to ease. Manisha Roy (1975) observed for Bengali women that "there is a lack of communication at the early stage of their marriage that changes into a relationship of some affection and respect later when the wife becomes the mother and the matron-mother" (161). While young women are often left out of decision-making processes, they gradually gain power and influence over their husbands and in-laws through their sons and eventually govern their own family compound. A woman literally "gives birth to 'her circle' [her own household]" (Gratz 2006, 533, translated by the author). By the time her own children are grown, the only source that can interrupt a mother's indirect rule of the house is a daughter-in-law, who might divert a son's attention and loyalty. She therefore strives to find a pliable girl and perpetuates the system of subordination.

While some husbands take on the role of mediator between a young wife and her in-laws, some men feel torn between family loyalties and the new women at their sides. Generalizing their findings from Morocco to many Muslim settings, Douglas and Susan Davis (1995) argue that men struggle with two contradictory stereotypes of women: the fantasy of a "lustful, seductive, and dangerous" (222) woman and the idealized mother-saint. From these two contesting ideas follows a tension between Islam's positive stance toward sexuality within matrimony as a foretaste of paradise and the threat conjugal affection poses for the husband's loyal position to his mother. Moreover, many men in South Asia expect their wives to serve them, and there is a general agreement among my interlocutors in Gilgit that women owe their husbands obedience. The Qur'an recommends physical punishment to discipline a disobedient wife, but contemporary advice manuals urge men to communicate calmly instead of resorting to violence (Rosenbaum 2017). Given the ubiquity of patriarchal control, though, some women find it best to adopt a kind of compromised subversion (Gratz 2006).

The most dominating man I met in Gilgit, the patriarch of a friend's family, would bellow commands whenever he was home: "[name], come here! (Shina: *inu vā*)" or "Hey, *mulā'ī* (Shina for girl)!" He would add urgency to his demands with a "*Lokolok* (Quick, quick)," directing his wife or one of his daughters to do even the simplest tasks, such as bringing him a glass of water or retrieving his mobile from the adjacent room. His commanding attitude, however, also displayed his complete dependence on the women around him; while he prided

himself on their subservience, he seemed unable even to break and dip bread into his morning tea. For their part, his wife and children regularly boycotted his first or second call, and only phlegmatically reacted when his nagging voice persisted. When he would burst into one of his long, routine, didactic speeches, his university-educated, grown-up children would simply ignore him with a bored and aloof expression on their faces. When their mother signaled being overburdened with his countless demands by rolling her eyes and exhaling loudly, one of the sons would readily jump up and carry out the task for her, giving his father an excuse on her behalf. Whether the father noticed these regular, small forms of resistance, I do not know, but everyone was careful not to expose him so obviously that his social standing would be undermined. In the end, a family member's reputation affects all.

Although the rates of domestic violence in Pakistan do not feature the high number of unregistered cases, Gilgit-Baltistan's rates are the lowest in the country: twelve percent of women having reportedly experienced abuse (Weiss 2014, 71). The most important support network in case of domestic abuse is a wife's natal family, and when life becomes too trying, many women seek refuge in their parental homes. This gives them time and power to renegotiate the circumstances of their lives at their in-laws' houses (Grover 2011). Adult brothers are expected to keep close and caring relationships with their married sisters, and nowadays often supply them with mobile phones. In-laws, conscious of what information might leave the house and tarnish the family's reputation, might not appreciate a young wife having her own phone, but mobiles can be lifelines for women in dangerous situations (Doron and Jeffrey 2013). In one of the houses I lived in for several months, we could periodically detect signs of physical abuse at our neighbors', be it sounds of an angry husband or bruises on the wife's face. When I interviewed the concerned woman, she portrayed herself not as a victim, but as a survivor, quickly drawing my attention to the more positive changes she had experienced recently:

> My husband fights with me all the time. That's why my brother has given me a mobile. He calls and asks how I am. The other day my husband hit me and I called my brother. He came and reprimanded my husband. One time my brothers even hit him because he was so furious. So now it has got a lot better; he doesn't fight so much anymore. When there was no mobile, my brothers didn't know when my husband hit me. Thanks to my mobile I can tell them now.

Her phone helped her stay close to her original family and to seek the protection she needed. But mobile phones can also function as a control mechanism for husbands. As one woman lamented, "He calls me again and again, many times a day, and asks: 'Where are you? What are you doing?'" Since many men are at their office or workplace during the day, they use their mobile to check on

their family. While some women expect their husbands to call them so they do not have to spend phone credit on their own, others experience them as a form of surveillance. Some middle-aged women in Gilgit used their inability to cope with modern technology as an excuse not to carry a phone of their own. This way, they maintain their old habit of solely being responsible for the household during the day and do not have to justify what they are doing. This lets them retain some space and independence. Others, especially of the younger generation, see it differently: Men are expected to check on their young wives regularly to demonstrate care and attention. *Khayāl rakhna* (to take care) is the most important expression of commitment and marital affection, and some of my interlocutors even see abuse as part of that caretaking. The older sister of one of my best friends, herself a victim of violence, put it like this: "Neglect is more hurtful than rage (*ghussa*)." While a forceful outburst can be blamed on a man's temper, or even be seen as a sign of his jealous love for his wife, negligence attests to a man's disinterest and disrespect, and thus indicates a woman's failure to win him over.

Structural patterns of oppression do not always translate into cruel practices on the ground: Mothers-in-law, as we have seen, can also encourage their sons to be good husbands. The phrase *khayāl rakhnā* indicates a husband's obligation toward his wife and ideally suggests a close and caring relationship between spouses. A man provides for his bride not only to play his role within the wider family setup but also as part of their barter relation (Gratz 2006). Since men are responsible for their wives' health, women quite frequently mobilize their physical condition to exercise their will, for example, to avoid housework or withdraw to their parent's house. I often had the impression that wives reassure themselves of their husbands' commitment through ailments that raise concern, require financial expenditure, and result in husbands accompanying their wives to the doctor. Moreover, physical suffering can function as proof of the hardships a wife copes with.

Many married women in the district of Gilgit told me that the division of labor and responsibilities along gender lines secured their rights and helped them feel confident demanding certain services from their husbands. This is part of his *kām* (work), as a middle-aged housewife summarizes: "When I have work for my husband, I give him a *missed call.* Then he has to call back and I tell him what to bring home [from the market]." Such mutual labor and care reinforce the gender roles of masculine provider and feminine custodian of the house, but also help create affectionate ties. Love is nurtured through providing care, receiving care, and appreciating care. Nasser El-Dine (2018) makes a similar argument when she interprets young Jordanian men's efforts to provide material resources for their girlfriends or wives not as a way to buy love, but to cultivate it. Many Gilgiti wives take a similar view, but they are also interested in making sure that others take notice of the efforts their husbands go to for

TABLE 3

Text Messages between Husband and Wife

Wife: Muje Bukhar ho raha hy	Wife: I'm getting a fever
Husband: Main to shopping pe jane ka soch raha tha	Husband: I was thinking of going shopping
Wife: Mazaq kar rahi thi	Wife: I was joking
Husband: Main b mazaq kar raha tha, Chal Rotti Paka ..!!	Husband: I was also joking, go and make bread ..!!

them. When female neighbors and relatives observe that "he takes very good care of her," the compliment almost serves as a medal of honor.

Husbands are often women's link to public life. Since there are no cinemas or other recreational facilities in Gilgit, and since taking a family to the restaurant is uncommon, a trip to the bazaar for shopping is a favorite activity for women. Upcoming weddings or religious holidays are occasions that justify taking a relatively adventurous trip to the inner city, and wives depend on their husbands to make arrangements. The joke in table 3, passed on as an SMS from phone to phone, plays with stereotypes of gendered roles in the marital relationship. Outside of such parodies, discussions of married life are widely absent from public discourse. Poems and songs almost exclusively parade a passionate, unconsummated love, or a lost and failed one, both very distinct from ordinary marital reality. I barely ever heard anyone talk about a married couple's romantic relationship. "Love" when directly verbalized was mostly connected to doomed efforts of earlier affairs, elopements, mental breakdowns, or suicide. One of my interlocutors described intimacy within marriage as "routinized": Couples grow together through habit. This "*routine vālā pyār*" symbolically downplays marital love and treats it equally with the *moḥabbat* love that is present among all family members. In other words, young husbands embed love for their wives within the family setting: Love is framed as a "duty" (Derné 2000, 97) to the wife as a family member, rather than ascribed to her individual qualities or characteristics.

When I wondered about the nature of marital affection, I felt I was reaching for an invisible elephant in the room. The *sharm*-induced distance that spouses put between them in front of any witnesses helps keep discussions of conjugal intimacy out of sight. Even though the choice of partners might be limited for

some people carrying social stigma or physical impairments, nearly every adult is married, and is therefore aware that demonstrative avoidance of one's spouse in public does not mean the same pattern holds in the private spheres of the bedroom or of their feelings. Yet conjugal affection is never directly talked about. Based on the role models provided by Prophet Muhammad's devoted love for his wife Aisha, and his daughter Fatima's "divine love bond and unique passion" with her husband Ali, Iran's political and spiritual leader Ayatollah Khamenei and other Islamic scholars advance a very affirmative view on marital "empathy and compassion" as well as mutually satisfying sexuality (Khamenei [1990] 2018; Rosenbaum 2017). It is therefore generally accepted, even appreciated, when affection develops after the wedding (Gratz 2006; Mody 2008; Ring 2006) but to publicly admit one's feelings would weaken a wife's standing in the relationship with her husband. Fondness between spouses can only be detected through the soft voices with which they speak about each other, the meaningful eye contact they exchange, the mutually playful ways they tease one another, the fact that they may rarely spend a night apart, or the devotion with which they attend to one another's ailments and happiness.

When I stayed at my friend Anika's house in a relatively remote village for some days, I was able to get a close view of a harmonious marriage. The couple had been married for about fifteen years, were both in their mid to late thirties, and lived alone with their three children. I was not fluent in their language, so as soon as we three adults were together I almost faded away into the background. Anika and her husband were not shy about showing evidence of their attachment when sitting around the fireplace in the evening. Her husband had brought in new supply of firewood without being asked, and while she prepared dinner, they chatted away merrily about what was going on in their jobs and the neighborhood. When we sat together after the meal, absorbed in the blueish light of the small TV screen, Anika used the opportunity to slightly lean on his shoulder.

Modest Sexuality?

It should come as no surprise that married couples have sex. Getting married and producing offspring stand at the core of most lives in Gilgit-Baltistan. Only when married is a person perceived to be a mature adult who can run an independent household. Children bring a purpose to life, something to be proud of and a means to acquire social recognition. They also secure parents' futures and are expected to take care of them in old age. The expectation that spouses maintain emotional and physical distance in front of others penetrates matrimony to its core, but since procreation is the focus of early marriage, young couples are expected also to develop a joint sexual life. The ways in which they manage their private encounters depend on their prior acquaintance with each other and their knowledge about sexuality.

In the area of Gilgit, children learn about sex by paying attention to what goes said and unsaid. With disgust, adults shout "Nāpāk!" which signifies filth and impurity, in the direction of toddlers who run around naked, touch their genitals, or make obscene gestures. Growing up within circles of women, both girls and boys gather bits of information about sexuality, but nothing is directly explained; while jokes are common, serious conversations are not held in front of minors. In the days before a girl's wedding, older women increasingly insinuate that she is to expect intimate get-togethers with her husband. Yet references to a man's *gājr* (carrot), for example, are not typically accompanied by instruction about the act of intercourse itself. Young brides are often fearful and uninformed: Many girls have heard stories of great pain. Others are so shy that they do not even try to imagine what their first sexual experiences will be like.

In school, sex education takes place within biology and Islamic studies classes. Students learn about procreation through detached, scientific descriptions of meiosis, or by memorizing religious doctrines concerning *zinā* (the sin of sex outside of marriage). What religious teachers in these neighborhood *madrasas* do not dare to speak out themselves can be found in detailed Islamic advice manuals that clarify ablution rules with regard to different phases of menstruation, childbirth, and sexual involvement, but do not explain the workings of intercourse itself. Through one of my male interlocutor's interactions with an Islamic scholar online, I received the link to Sayyid Athar Husayn Rizvi's *Marriage and Morals in Islam* (1994), which contains recommendations for married life and sexual techniques. Johannes Rosenbaum (2017) has translated and analyzed other contemporary Urdu advice manuals, both from Pakistan and India. Targeting Muslims on either side of the border, Rosenbaum found they clearly recommend consensual intercourse, recognize women's right to satisfaction, and endorse stimulation during foreplay. While these manuals are written by doctors or Sunni clerics, the content resembles the types of advice young Gilgiti men find as they consult sketchy leaflets circulated among friends, as well as discussions on online platforms, such as wikishia.net or Islamquest.net, that raise their awareness of Islam's recognition of women's sexual needs and desires.[3]

Most women I talked to, however, have never consulted any books or websites, and gather information orally or through their own experiences. For example, when my friend Soni got married, she gradually got to know her husband physically and sexually. Every morning Soni would take a full ritual shower (*ghusl*), which included washing her long, thick hair with cold water, to cleanse herself of the sexual fluids that polluted her body following their nightly encounter. She gave me daily updates on their progress, so after they had been together for about two weeks, I knew that they were at the stage of intensive kissing and petting. When I was talking about sexuality with Soni's significantly older sister, she used Soni and her husband as an example of how some couples are quick to have intercourse in the very first nights of their marriage. When I

corrected her, she started laughing and called Soni over to lecture her: "Have you two slept together yet? No? Then why do you shower? Only because you get wet? Haha, child, you are so ignorant. You only have to shower when he . . . [ejaculates]." While Soni was not embarrassed to find us talking about her sex life, she felt very exposed at being called out for being unfamiliar with the right religious ethics. She had wanted to do things correctly, and to ensure she did not step in front of God for her morning prayers "polluted" by her sexual excitement.

For most women, having others discern when they have had intercourse with their husband alludes to their sense of *sharm*. As one interlocutor recounted, about the mornings after her first nights together with her husband, "I was so embarrassed that I could barely bring myself to look any of my in-laws or other relatives in the eyes." The shame seems to remain throughout married life. In one of my host families, the older mother used to laugh nervously when I entered the kitchen in the morning for tea; she knew that her new set of clothes, and her hair still wet from an early shower, gave her away. As total inversion of gender segregation, such visibility of the conjugal relationship makes embodied *sharm* especially vulnerable.

Nevertheless, it is clear to all household members that husband and wife spend nights together. That can become even more obvious in smaller households, where the whole family sleeps in the same room. The oldest daughter of one of my friends once indirectly complained to me that she occasionally noticed what was going on under her parents' heavy Chinese blankets: "I cover my head with the quilt and put my hands over my ears." To avoid the presence of others, some women told me they would find times to be with their husbands when the house was empty, for example, when the children were in school. Finding a private spot must have been the common practice in former times when the entire extended family shared one big room and women and men slept on opposite sides of the fireplace. Even when alone, in intimate situations where physical distance cannot be maintained, modesty sustains a certain conceptual reserve: Partners commonly do not undress completely, or do not examine each other in detail. Moreover, intercourse mostly takes place in darkness. A young wife once told me that she had never had a close look at the lower part of a male body until she changed the diapers of her baby son. The perception of naked skin seems to have shifted during the last century. Old people sometimes report that everyone used to sleep naked, and a few grandmothers still take their shirts off when crawling under the blanket at night; these generations obviously did not associate nudity with eroticism to the same degree as is nowadays propagated by TV programs and other media.

Although most men in the area of Gilgit are also quite inexperienced in sexual matters at the time of their wedding,[4] they are greatly influenced by sex scenes from films—preferably from Hollywood, which features blunter sex scenes with more nudity than Bollywood—and pornography. Both are widely

available in video stores or on the internet. Although most pornographic material comes from the United States, some also comes from a variety of other Asian countries including India, and, as I have been told, there are even sex clips in the local Shina language. The more common it is for young men to consume such media, the more freely they talk about sex with their peers. Two girls told me that their cousins even showed some erotic clips to them. A roughly twenty-year-old man from one of the valleys surrounding Gilgit summed up his personal opinion about what he saw as an indecent development: "Boys watch wrong things. Ninety to ninety-five percent watch sex movies. Ten percent of the girls also do that. In Gilgit, the internet facility is not good enough [in 2014], so they do that 'down' [in the Punjab] in the hostel. That's why boys turn bad. When they watch sex movies, they also want to do it. Here more than eighty percent of the boys look at girls with wrong thoughts on their mind, they always think about sex." The young man hints at an increasingly consumerist attitude toward sex. In an extensive study of Indian sexuality, Sanjay Srivastava (2007) notes that for the new middle classes in India's big cities, many aspects of their life, including sexuality, have taken on such a commercial and commodified character. Since Islamic morals—in Gilgit as elsewhere—condemn sexual encounters outside of marriage, and in most interpretations also masturbation, young men do not have many options to fulfill their desires. In my conversations with them, I gathered that it is mostly older males who have the money and the nerves to patronize the local brothel in the quarter of Konodas, or to visit widows who receive suitors from the neighborhood. Trade with China also provides opportunities for business trips on which men may consume alcohol and visit prostitutes. The younger generation, on the other hand, depends on more personal, but mostly abstinent, relationships that often take place in the anonymity of college life in Pakistan's big cities.

The majority of first-hand accounts of boys' sexual experiences that I collected refer to relationships with girls that solely took place over the mobile phone. Young men told me that these affairs are characterized by intimate conversation and occasionally even phone sex. "One night I awoke to the *sexy* words and groaning sounds of one of my roommates. I realized he was talking to his girlfriend on the phone. When they finished, he went into the washroom," a young man told me, describing what he said was a regular occurrence during his college days. Another man proudly showed me his erotic chats with foreign women he had never met. His most recent text to one of them read: "I dreamed last night that I laid next to you in bed and your skin was hot and I never wanted to wake up." Boys mostly develop these relationships in hostels, and the freedom they experience raises their expectations of the sex life that awaits them after marriage. Since premarital desire is not stigmatized for men, the boys with whom I spoke did not seem to be ashamed to admit their desires. Yet many were

surprised when I let them in on the secret that many young women are also interested in erotic topics and talk about them frequently. Because girls are modest, shy, and intimidated in the presence of men, one boy lamented, "Girls here [in Gilgit] are so well-behaved, they drive us into homosexuality."

Due to a lack of physical caresses before one's wedding and delayed marriage age, young (heterosexual) men do sometimes resort to homosexual practices. One of my acquaintances had what he called a "washroom friend," because they took showers together. He was so content with this arrangement that he was worried about giving it up when he finally got married; he admitted that he was insecure about what to do with a female body in bed. Since he was the one penetrating his "washroom friend," he never considered himself to be gay; that is a stigma attached to the receiving partner. Countless rumors circulate among boys about peers who got expelled from school when it became known that they had taken the passive role, even when forced or paid for it. In contrast, most of the girls with whom I spoke had never heard of homosexual practices, though they did pass on older stories of men and goats on the high pastures.

No matter how sexually experienced boys may be, they neither expect nor want their future wife to have such expertise. One of my friends explained that her virginity was a "packing gift" for her husband: Giving her body to a man represents the ultimate inversion of *parda* into intimacy. Making themselves so vulnerable is something most women only dare to do within the security of wedlock. Young married couples are far likelier to make their first sexual experiences together than they are to have had premarital adventures, and ideally this creates a trusting and intimate bond. Young couples tell me that merely spending time alone with their partner is very pleasurable. Girls especially enjoy putting on make-up, showing their hair, and having long conversations. After they get more comfortable with one another, many couples develop and act upon physical attraction, enjoy hugging, kissing, and sexual caresses. At the same time, however, young women today find themselves struggling with their husbands' fantasies, for example, when they ask them to completely disrobe for the act of intercourse, or to engage in unorthodox positions or practices, such as oral sex. Although most interpretations of Islam do not prohibit these acts (Rizvi 2014), the majority of women I spoke with in Gilgit, no matter their age, consider them indecent and say they have no prior experience of them. Since embodied modesty guides their thoughts and feelings, their perception of decency renders more unconventional sexual desires "wrong." Similarly, women gossip about stories of anal sex during the impure period of menstruation, a sexual practice that Islamic law treats more controversially, and that most of my friends dismissed as immoral.

The standard sexual acts between couples seem to be touching of the breasts, the missionary position, and the reverse missionary position. Although

one of the twelve leaders of Shia Islam, Imam Muhammad al-Baqir, said, "The best woman among you is the one who discards the armor of shyness when she undresses for her husband, and puts on the armor of shyness when she dresses up again" (Rizvi 1994), some young men complained that their women are stiff and passive in bed. The description is hard for me to imagine, considering the liveliness among women when they are by themselves, but comprehensibly in line with their sense of *sharm*. Women mostly expect the initiative for intercourse to come from their husbands. Some may be too shy to start off, others do not consider it modest for a woman to express lust; to gain one's husband's attention, they resort to indirect and non-verbal cues such as physical touch or dressing up. On the other hand, the obligation to concede to a husband's wishes is part of the implicit advice girls hear before their wedding. Feminists even describe them as mere passive recipients who were raised to suppress their desires (Patel 2010). The expression Gilgiti women used to talk to me in Urdu about their sexual relationships, *kām karnā* (to work), might be seen as evidence for this view. Speaking in Shina, older women would simply say, devoid of judgment, "*Gaṭī be sones* (We sleep under one blanket)." Many women also reported that after some initial practice they enjoyed sexual intercourse: "*shoq ātī hai* (desire comes)" or "*maza ātā hai* (pleasure comes)." My impressions correspond with numbers from a study in rural and urban Bangladesh (Khan, Townsend, and D'Costa 2002) where about two thirds of the women questioned reported that they appreciated their sexual lives. The experience of pleasure resists the common trope of women's passive submission in the marital bed.

Rosenbaum (2017) shows that Islamic theological perspectives have a generally positive attitude toward sexuality, as long as it takes place within marriage. While many scholars condemn practices such as masturbation, anal penetration, or any form of contraception except coitus interruptus, they emphasize the importance of consensual intercourse and women's sexual, emotional, and bodily needs. Although all the scholars depict women as passive recipients, they agree that women should be stimulated before penetration to experience pleasure. In order to achieve mutual satisfaction, Islamic texts clearly recommend kissing and foreplay—or what my friends called *tayyār karnā* (make ready). Rizvi (1994) even equates intercourse without foreplay to "cruelty" or "animal behaviour." Women should reach climax, the advice goes, so that they are not forced to direct their desires onto others, and thus create chaos among men.

Enjoying sexuality within the cloak of passivity allows women to maintain modest chastity. Accordingly, my female interlocutors often emphasize their men's greater sexual drive: "*Vo zīāda sexy hai* (He is especially potent)." Many wives report daily or regular nightly intercourse. Older women amusedly shared their strategies with me, how to excuse themselves and lessen the frequency of sex, because they are worn out from the hard, daily work in the house, or are



FIGURE 10 Marital bedsite, made new every evening in the common area of the house.

Photo by the author.

weary of the obligatory shower in the morning. Although sometimes a burden, frequent sex is seen as proof of a healthy relationship, and its lack perceived as moderate crisis (Grover 2011) that leads to concerned discussions among women on how to counter the problem. Most females openly share sexual issues with their peers in order to find a remedy, which often involves the woman taking more active parts in their sexual lives, for example, by trying to seduce her husband by putting on perfume or make-up.

Due to economic pressures and the high level of female education, family planning is widely known and practiced in Gilgit-Baltistan today. There is a government-trained *Lady Health Worker* in almost every village in Gilgit district who tells women about birth control and hands out condoms or contraceptive pills. For other measures, such as hormone injections or insertion of the coil (IUD), women have to consult doctors. Two men even proudly told me about getting vasectomies after fathering four or five children. Rumors about negative side effects of family planning techniques, such as stripping a man of his virility, are sometimes the subject of women's conversations and can be read as a sign of their active appropriation of new norms into their moral framework.

Although a 2008 survey of Gilgit-Baltistan suggests that forty-eight percent of urban and twenty-six percent of rural women use family planning techniques, the number among the Sunni population was significantly lower than among

Shia and Ismaili (Varley 2012b). Pakistani state programs that justify contraceptive use do not necessarily coincide with religious (especially Sunni) preaching to bear as many children as God sends. Withdrawal seems to be the most widespread technique to increase the spacing between children and preserve a mother's health, since everyone agrees that it is explicitly allowed by the Prophet. According to Shia teachings, though, measures to regulate family size are permissible (Rizvi 1994). Living on a low-lying property on Gilgit's outskirts in the summer of 2014, I could witness the array of plastic debris the system of water channels carried with it when it was supplied with fresh water every three to four days: Between heaps of plastic bags and wrappers a small number of condoms flowed into the garden and fields.

Although discussions about contraceptives increase steadily, the final decision about their usage lies with men who, especially those from the older generations, often take the matter casually. Pregnancies, unwanted or not, are in the end considered women's business. This carelessness seems to be the cause for what initially struck me as a surprisingly high number of abortions. While most interpretations of Islam only allow abortions in the first months, with the understanding that a fetus becomes a human being when its heart starts beating, a few of the women I spoke with had legal, as well as illegal, abortions performed on them by medical personnel at all stages of their pregnancies.[5] Doctors are allowed to perform an abortion if it secures a mother's life, but my interlocutors repeatedly told me about the existence of few, locally known gynecologists who "help" women, even without such medical indications. Since such terminations are illegal, they can be very pricey. All of the women who confided in me about their abortions took a harsh, utilitarian stance toward their own bodies. They felt it legitimate to come to a calculated decision about what the increased workload of raising another child would entail, especially when that child would be the consequence of their husbands' negligence.

Premarital affairs that lead to pregnancy may also end with abortions. Emma Varley (2008) writes that medical personnel of Gilgit's hospitals report illicit pregnancies; some are terminated early, while others culminate in secret deliveries and the shuttling off of babies to discreet, even secret orphanages; however, she does not quantify these cases. Although premarital pregnancies might be kept highly confidential, my own findings suggest that most abortions take place within marriage, when women are in their late thirties and early forties and already overburdened with family responsibilities because of a high number of children. In conversations, women repeatedly used the term "abortion" for both involuntary miscarriages and the conscious choice to abort a fetus. Medically speaking, this terminology is correct, and for the women it might be a linguistic strategy to cover up their own responsibility in the incident. Once again, these narratives show that by suffering as a woman perseveres through obstacles, she does not yield to subordination, but engages in actively forming her destiny.

Broken Bonds, or Negotiating Change

Even when marriages fall short of couples' hopes, most women reject divorce. Although Islam offers the legal right of divorce (*ṭalāq*) and the Pakistani state guarantees its application, Gilgiti women generally understand it as a personal failure. A wife who fails to win the sympathy of her husband and has to move to her brother's house and depend on his family for support is seen as a disgrace (Tapper 1991). Moreover, social custom and Islamic law assign guardianship of children to the father.[6] Given these obstacles, most women carry on and depict difficult marriages as trials. The Pakistani lawyer and women rights activist Rashida Patel (2003) suggests that such practices and sentiments, which are common across South Asia, are influenced by Hindu laws and customs where marriage is permanent and indissoluble even in the afterlife. While divorce may be legal, people only partially back the right to have it. That plays out in how laws are enforced. The *Muslim Family Laws Ordinance* (MFLO), for example, requires that all marriages and divorces be registered with the state. But many citizens and government officials instead follow the customary practices of Islamic, mostly Hanafi, law. Instead of adhering to the legally required ninety-day reconciliation period, they solely hold a man and a woman (or her guardian) responsible for sealing the marriage contract, and grant men the right of instant verbal divorce (known as "triple *ṭalāq*"[7]). Amendments to the *Family Court Act* in 2002 are similarly inefficient. Technically, women in Pakistan no longer have to prove the impossibility of conjugal harmony to initiate divorce, but when asserting their right in court they often face discouraging inquiries into their private lives denouncing their shortcomings as wives (Ahmed 2014; Patel 2003; Weiss 2014). The Shia population of Gilgit-Baltistan tend to handle complicated family matters not in terms the government has laid out, but in line with their own religious interpretations and authorities.[8]

All cases of divorce initiated by Gilgiti women that I witnessed or heard of happened during the period between *nikāḥ* and *shādī*. Locals perceived such cases as examples of *inkār* (defiance as a means of refusal), a term that, strictly speaking, refers to dismissal from an engagement. Nevertheless, since *nikāḥ* counts as a legally binding marriage, even if the marriage was never consummated, a divorce is required. Under Section 18 of the Pakistani *nikāḥ nāma* (marriage contract), which is also used by the Shia population of Gilgit-Baltistan, there is an optional clause that gives the bride the right of divorce (*ṭalāq*). But Gilgiti customs demand modesty from women, most of whom are not even aware of this possibility. As a result, the clause is rarely activated in the marriage contract, and it falls exclusively to the husband to grant divorce. Nevertheless, the liminal phase between *nikāḥ* and *shādī* opens possibilities for negotiation, and gives women opportunities to escape an unhappy match before children complicate the matter. So it went in one divorce case that I

watched unfold over time.[9] The following account illustrates how marriage-related disputes are foremost resolved by family members and kin. Only if the intervention is not successful will people turn toward religious authorities—both extra-judicial systems that take a rather "paternalistic approach" (Vatuk 2017, 3) toward women but, at the same time, also offer them room to navigate.

During a calm summer afternoon in one of Gilgit's suburbs, when I was sitting in the dimly lit kitchen with the women of the household, a middle-aged woman rushed into the room. "*Qasm Allah ki* (I swear by God, it's true)," she exclaimed, signaling that something almost unimaginable had happened. Her name was Saba, an older cousin of my hosts; she had just arrived from a village after a two-hour journey by jeep, bringing the latest news of a family scandal. Her voice was tense, and she breathed heavily. Everyone stopped working and sat down on the floor around her. With a panicked, tormented expression on her face, Saba explained how, a few nights ago, her husband, a well-respected *sheikh* (Shiite religious scholar), had been called to the house of some relatives for the night because they had anticipated trouble and had asked for his support. They were right: In the shadows of darkness and deserted mountain roads, fifteen to twenty men had entered the village in their four-wheel-drive jeeps. The whole village had been woken up by the sounds of warning shots being fired into the sky with Kalashnikovs. The interlopers had come in support of their family member, a man who demanded that he be allowed to take Mariyam, his rightful bride, home with him. Their *nikāḥ* had taken place some years before, but the marriage had never been fully executed according to local practices and she still lived with her parental family. The problem was that Mariyam refused to go ahead with the *shādī*.

Saba's husband, Sada Ali, later filled me in on some of the details from that night. As an influential Islamic scholar and senior member of the family, he had issued the commands in the house while it was under attack. He described how Mariyam and her mother had hidden in the back rooms while he and the family's two sons barricaded the entrance door, crouched out of view behind it, and shouted out warnings that they would have to shoot anyone who came close to the door to kidnap the bride. None of the attackers dared take that risk, having expected that their mere presence would cause the bride's family to surrender. Alarmed by the echo of firing from the surrounding mountains, more and more armed villagers arrived on the scene in support of their neighbors, and eventually the intruders made their escape. Mariyam's mother had called the police, but the unpaved mountain roads were in a bad condition, and the distance to the next settlement sufficiently large, that the police did not arrive in time to do anything. However, Mariyam's family filed a case the next day and six men from the groom's family—including the groom himself—were arrested and taken to jail. Having intervened to defend a girl whom many people saw as

defying both Islamic law and custom, Sada Ali found himself subject to accusations of being honorless and self-righteous. His opponents openly ridiculed him, and his own relatives remained skeptically silent.

After a period of stunned surprise and curious questioning of Saba, the girls in the kitchen resumed their work of cooking a vegetable stew and making flat bread (*roṭī*). Being busy did not divert their attention from the divorce case, though, and they quickly became absorbed in discussion. Even with my limited Shina language skills, I could follow the tone of their conversation well enough to grasp their dominant sentiments. Clicking their tongues in disbelief, they expressed compassion for Saba and appalled disgust at the outbreak of violence. Eventually, I was able to comprehend the full scenario with the help of my friend Sarah, who took the time to patiently answer the many questions I had. Mariyam's marriage had been arranged by her father when she was only fourteen. Her father passed away before the *nikāḥ* took place, but she consented to the wedding out of a sense of duty. Some older women I talked the case over with commented that she had been too young to comprehend the consequences of such a big decision, explaining that "Her mind was immature (*uskā zehen choṭā thā*)." Nevertheless, they credited her for complying with what was expected of an obedient and modest daughter.

The couple got to know each other in the years following their *nikāḥ* through the groom's frequent visits. Then, about three years ago, Mariyam decided that she did not want to proceed with the marriage, and she asked her husband to set her free. When he did not agree, Mariyam's family tried for a long time to pressure her into going forward with the *shādī*, but without success. She was now about twenty-two years old and the conflict had escalated to such an extent that her family felt they had no way to protect her unless the divorce took place. While Mariyam's family resorted to the police to help contain violence, neither party regarded a judicial approach a valid way to solve the divorce case. So Mariyam's older brothers, tasked with leading the family now that their father had died, asked their relative Sada Ali, a well-respected religious scholar, to support them. He is known to be loyal to his Islamic beliefs, which often place him in opposition to customary codes of honor, for he promotes certain women's rights in line with popular Islamic feminist demands, and believes that couples can have conjugal sexual relationships after their *nikāḥ,* since it is the legitimate Islamic wedding. As many of Gilgit's Shia population, Sada Ali follows the Iraqi spiritual leader Ayatollah Sistani, who demands that a husband pronounce divorce if a woman hates him so much that she can no longer live with him and surrenders any claims to her dower (Al-Sistani 2017). Moreover, Shiite law requires a written contract in the presence of two witnesses to terminate the marriage (Patel 2003).

As my friend Sarah considered the potential consequences of this impasse, including acts of revenge on Sada Ali for getting the husband's family members

put in jail, she murmured angrily: "She should have accepted and tolerated it." She is about the same age as Mariyam, and in the same stage of life between *nikāḥ* and *shādī*. Many of the younger women I talked with echoed Sarah's harsh judgment and blamed Mariyam for creating the scandal. What they criticized most fervently was her *āna* and *ẓid*, her ego and stubbornness, that drew so many people into a spiral of violent threats and widespread gossip reflecting badly on her relatives' reputations. They were bewildered at how she could be so selfish as to claim the right to put her own interests before those of her family. One could understand a refusal a few months after *nikāḥ*, but not after so many years of dating. Most girls believed that once feelings are directed toward a certain person, they are irrevocably fixed. It was even said that Mariyam herself had started rumors that she liked another man, who was already married and did not seem to be interested in her. This suspicion appalled Sarah most: While forcefully bouncing a *roṭī* back and forth between her hands to form an even circle, she reasoned that if Mariyam really was interested in someone else after *nikāḥ*, she should have kept silent and "hidden it in the heart." To expose one's own feelings or exaggerate one's importance is the most shameless (*besharm*) thing that girls can do. In contrast, the groom's family was devoted to customary values, which earned them many sympathizers. However, the men had crossed a line, because educated people could not approve of the violent escalation of the conflict. Traditional expectations clashed with reformed understandings of norms and values. The more I learned about the story, the clearer it became that the parties involved were not passive victims of local beliefs, but instead, were creatively determining their path of action by drawing upon different sets of morals.

While the women were still discussing and working in the kitchen, more visitors arrived at the house. Sada Ali, who had come to our house with his wife, called for a gathering of close family members. The circle included Mariyam's brothers, respected elders of the family, and some younger males. Two mature women and I were the only women present. Since a single person's actions affect the whole extended family, the men set out to find a consensus. Justice is best done to the highly formalized and refined manner they conversed in by quoting an extract from my field diary:

> Each of the men presents his opinion slowly and with sincerity, vividly illustrating it with a story and gestures of his hands. He gets as much time as he needs to make his point without anyone interrupting or commenting in between. All the others listen and watch attentively, seemingly lost in thought, and then, after a small pause, another man chimes in to remark on the latest contributions. Every opinion is treated with respect; the atmosphere is calm and composed; even in their respective speeches they do not get too agitated. I'm fascinated by how they negotiate the

interests, benefits, and obstacles of the current situation, and strive to find a unified way forward.

One of the family's elders fervently defended girls' education, while an uncle pointed out that girls nowadays change their mind (*zehen*) when they go to the bigger cities for higher education, where they are able to compare their lives with those of others and become aware of their qualities, whether they be intelligence, wealth, or beauty. Another man called for the group to consider the risk that Mariyam's case might establish a precedent that could be exploited by other daughters, negatively affecting their attitudes with the result that "the environment will be spoilt (*maḥol kharāb hogā*)." This argument was reinforced by a young man who feared that "They will want to get divorced over everything (*Har hāl men ṭalāq*)." Of course, some men's words weigh more heavily than others, and Sada Ali was very clear about his pious approach: Allah's wish for a righteous treatment of women should carry more weight than concerns about social pressure or the fear of ridicule. The two women did not interfere; nevertheless, some of the men repeatedly looked in their direction to see their silent facial expressions of agreement or disagreement. After many hours of discussion, the family decided to continue on the path they had taken thus far: to dissolve the marriage because the groom's family's behavior was not acceptable. They set their hopes on the intervention of a *jirga*, an assembly of village dignitaries, which was to be installed during the next few days.

Throughout Pakistan, *jirgas* offer a well-respected and well-established mechanism to solve problems and are accepted by the state as a parallel means of exercising jurisdiction (Chaudhary 1999). A *jirga* usually consists of two or three impartial elders and *sayyids* (religious dignitaries descended from the Prophet Muhammad) from either of the parties or villages in dispute, and they typically hear all persons involved in order to resolve the quarrel. The peace compromise reached by the *jirga* must be accepted without objections by all affected. To the public's surprise, the groom's family did not accept the proposal to hand the issue over to a *jirga*, although they themselves had boasted about upholding the traditional code of conduct. They must have feared that the elders' opinions might lean toward a differing interpretation of morals.

Over the next few days, I visited various families related to the divided couple and absorbed the talk unfolding around them. Sitting around the fireplace in the cold winter afternoons, the younger generation speculated about the details with agitation. As is often the case with girls and young women, they were not taken into confidence by the elders and had to weave comprehensive accounts out of the scarce information they had. Older women only reluctantly joined in the gossip and expressed their disapproval with snorts and rolling eyes. Someone had heard that the groom had bribed Mariyam to sleep with him by paying for her college fees. Others claimed to know that she simply realized her

husband was not a good match when she got to know him better as he, for example, did not approve of her writing poetry. Someone blamed Mariyam's abuse of SMS chats with other men, although at the time of her initial request for divorce, her village was not yet connected to a mobile phone network. No one knew for sure what the marital relationship was like in the first years after their *nikāḥ*. One day, when I was working alongside some women in the vegetable garden, a young relative came in holding in his hand an unsealed letter that Mariyam's groom had sent her from prison. Our messenger, who had been a classmate of the groom, passed on a passionate declaration of the boy's love for Mariyam and an appeal to release their families from the obligation of revenge by giving in. Here are some selected lines:

> Look Mariyam, today I am in prison, but I don't regret anything. It is sad that all this has happened between us. [. . .] Why has our relationship changed into enmity? [. . .] This is all our fault. Thanks to Allah, no innocent life has been wasted so far, but what will tomorrow bring—murder and destruction? There will remain hostility between both families, generation after generation [. . .] [Once] your younger brothers' corpses will come in front of you, you will understand what you keep on doing. [. . .] I cannot divorce you because you have become my honor. To defend my honor, I can give my own life and also take others' lives. [. . .] [If you come to me] I will touch the feet of your whole family and go to all their houses to ask for forgiveness. [. . .] Well, maybe my sin is that I fully loved you. [. . .] I have never hated you. In my heart is always love for you. [. . .] But even Allah sits as a spectator.

While the young man sought to demonstrate his good intentions, his drastic words provoked ambivalent reactions: Romantic sighs from some girls for the lovesick devotee, as well as expressions of disgust from older women, who were afraid of actual bloodshed and revolted by the pressure he was exercising. The groom's friend defended him as having been provoked by his family, especially his dominant mother. Interestingly, both sides of the conflict invoked perceptions of "modernity," as the groom repeatedly used the same argument against Mariyam that others had used against him: "You're educated, please make a thoughtful decision (*Āp paṛhi-likhī ho, āp jo faiṣla karegī soc-samajh kar lo*)."

I finally met Mariyam some time after seeing this letter. Many of my younger female friends kept their distance from her out of fear of being "contaminated" by her reputation, but on the day in question I was walking through her *moḥalla* (neighborhood) with the son of a friend of mine. I could hear her from quite a distance away, as she was arguing with some other people in a strident voice. For three days in a row, there had hardly been any electricity as a result of bad weather and frozen streams, and everyone's mobile phone batteries were dead. One of the neighbors had just switched on a generator and the girls were

fighting with some boys for their share of sockets. The fuss calmed down as I approached. Mariyam took on a more composed attitude and was curious to know who this unknown woman was. We were only able to exchange a few sentences of small talk, because Sada Ali had forbidden her from talking about the divorce matter with anyone, but it was still enough for me to get a general impression of her as a confident, energetic woman.

After a few weeks of *tension*, as the term is used in local parlance, the initial discomposure was fading and Saba's and Sada Ali's nerves calmed down. Because no consensus could be reached, Mariyam's family approached an influential religious scholar in Karachi who presented the case to an Iranian *mujtahid* (religious jurist with the right to independent interpretation of Islamic law). In the end, a religious authority in another country served a practical function as a parallel legal system to dissolve the marriage; no matter of this is an official act in Pakistan, as Shia, the husband's family could no longer persist in their demand for the bride. Mariyam's family dropped civil charges and everyone was released from jail. Although the events had consumed a great deal of energy and patience from both families, in the end Saba wished Mariyam well and predicted optimistically that her family would manage to recover from this scandal. Whether they would be able to find a proper husband for her was a different matter. She was widely praised for her fair looks—white skin, light hazel eyes, brownish hair, and a round, soft face—but it would be a challenge to win the trust of potential in-laws.

The different protagonists in Mariyam's story personify a politics of the sensible, which is culturally defined but not destined. While the men of the family assembly feel the compelling force of kinship cohesion, which might be supportive for some and make others feel obligated, they actively debate and shape family politics. Common worries and shared experiences bind them together. Yet even as emotions function like an adhesive for these family members, they were also responsible for the growing distance between Mariyam and her groom. After agreeing to her wedding as a teenager, Mariyam changed her mind over time, partly after being exposed to epistemologies other than familial duty, but most importantly when she grew to dislike her husband—or, perhaps, to favor someone else.

Defending Mariyam's demand for divorce, Sada Ali had to face gossip and ridicule for being an honorless (*baghairat*) coward because he supported a "frivolous" girl, yet did not pick up arms to fight when challenged. Most people who sympathized with him for taking such an educated and wise decision nevertheless agreed that Mariyam herself had greatly offended her family by selfishly flouting their collective honor (*'izzat*), as well as by spurning societal norms. The extensive gossip about Mariyam often completely ignored her emotional side; having embodied normative expectations, many women felt her transgression at a physical level and were repulsed. Their rigid moral judgment affirms the

existence and efficacy of emotions in the social sphere rather than within the individual.

Overall, Mariyam's case demonstrates how marriage, gender relations, and a wife's role, as well as complex emotions such as honor and love, are under constant negotiation. They cannot be regarded as isolated from other developments, such as education, marriage age, and state law and its enforcement, nor from shifting interpretations of Islam. As modes of matchmaking turn from family considerations toward individuals' concerns, and from a daughter-in-law as an addition to the female circle to the marital couple, the process of wife and husband growing together is changing. While they used to adjust through the hardships of daily life, the liminal phase between *nikāḥ* and *shādī* is now affording opportunities to get to know each other before the bride moves into the groom's home. This also changes the meaning of sexuality that was strongly linked to procreation and now increasingly serves to intensify the conjugal bond before marital obligations, such as childcare, take over.

Parallel to these changes in young couples' intimacy, mobile telephony was introduced in Gilgit in 2006 and in subsequent years made accessible all over the region.[10] Cell phones have increasingly become an important medium of interaction with one's spouse, especially when bargaining more democratic or equal relationship terms. And they are part of how residents of Gilgit and its environs are redefining their marriage from within.

On a cold but sunny winter day, my good friend Samiah got into a quarrel with her husband when we were walking toward the doctor's office with one of her younger siblings, who was sick. Samiah and her husband had been married for about two years and lived with his family in a village outside of Gilgit. Because Samiah preferred the comforts of the city, she came to visit her natal family regularly, and we tried to meet up on such occasions. During the mornings, Samiah's husband worked as a high school teacher, but now it was afternoon and his mobile phone was still switched off (*band*). Samiah kept on trying to reach him every ten minutes and sent him countless SMS messages. "Hello." "Where are you?" "Call me." She did not have anything important to discuss, but she was increasingly annoyed that his phone was not yet turned on. He called her back about half an hour after her first inquiry and informed her that he had to work late. When she asked why, he was so upset that he hung up: A wife is not supposed to question her husband directly. Samiah told me they had such quarrels over nothing of importance quite frequently, and she wanted to reconcile with him. Since her husband's mobile was now off again, she called her cousin, a neighbor in their village, and asked her to convey the message to him that he should talk to Samiah. She explained it to me as an indirect request for a truce. Her husband understood; a few minutes later, he called her, and they conversed as if nothing had happened.

Here, it is not the man exercising his power over the spouse, but the woman testing her limits with him. While mobile phones allow young wives to tease out their standing over a secure distance, they can also make coordination between lovers easier or, vice versa, function as means of surveillance. A newly engaged woman in her mid-twenties reports (paraphrased from field notes):

> My fiancé just told me a terrible story. There was this young woman who had an affair and secretly met her lover in the corn field. When she returned home, she realized that she had lost her mobile and told her husband that one of their little children had dropped it in the toilet when she was doing laundry in the washroom. A few days later, the man helped his friend with the corn harvest and found a phone that looked just like his wife's. He took it to a repair shop to unlock the password and found all her lover's SMS. He divorced her instantly.

Which parts of the story are actually true will never be verified, but it illustrates the ongoing examination of possible threats, not only pre- but also extramarital. So long as affairs between neighbors who met, for example, in the cow shed or when moving goats on remote meadows stayed secret, they could be ignored. As mobile connections materialize infidelity in the form of call logs, messages or even elopements, they lay open what is not supposed to happen in front of others' eyes. The next chapter will focus on real and supposed affairs, and will show that only few affairs are actually consummated. The all-encompassing fervor of '*ishq* love mostly manifests as one-directional, yet not less effective, admiration.

4

Fearing Passion

Gilgiti women strive to establish close, loving relationships with their husbands over the course of their marriage, deliberatively cultivating intimacy, affection, and the familial love of *moḥabbat*. Such feelings stand in stark contrast to passionate love, which is commonly understood, across South Asia, as *'ishq*. It is characterized, as Ring writes, by a loss of self, of willpower, of one's agency, or even an "invasion [of the self] by alien agencies—supernatural, divine, human, and/or fated" (Ring 2006, 147). An individual afflicted with *'ishq* is overpowered by emotions and will go to great lengths of suffering for the cause of love. Such passion[1] drives people to risk everything, including their lives.

Pressure from kin, dependence on family structures, fear of social isolation, and, most importantly, an inner sensor of modesty, all prevent young people, especially women, in Gilgit-Baltistan and across South Asia from overstepping the boundaries of gender segregation, which can put them at risk of being overcome by *'ishq*. But Pakistani men, who do not risk a loss of reputation when showing their emotions, are more prone to fall victim to such passion beyond judgment. Urdu novels from the nineteenth century already identified men as the more ardent gender (Oesterheld 2016), whose "central emotion was not *muhabbat*, the love restrained by reason, but *'ishq*, the passionate love that led the lover to sacrifice not only the calm of his everyday life, but his mental peace, his rationality, and finally his life" (Pernau 2016, 33).

Women grow up to embody modest reserve to mitigate what Sara Ahmed ([2004] 2014), writing about the emotionality ascribed to women or other marginalized groups, calls weakness or softness. Softness, she says, "is defined in terms of a tendency to be shaped by others" (2), and this passivity makes people vulnerable. This assessment certainly fits the Pakistani, as well as Gilgiti, context where women deny fervent love access to their life in order to protect themselves, their emotional integrity, and their interests. This is not an entirely

conscious and strategic decision; it emerges, as Ring (2006) explains, from the framework of embodied modesty: "Purdah, then—restriction on visibility and vision, but also the prevention of self-exposure through reticence, silence, downcast eyes, and closed mouth—is aimed in part at protecting and preserving those most human (read: culturally valued) of faculties: reason, will, agency (148)." Since most women formally depend on men, both economically and socially, they work hard to hold onto the independence they have: emotional self-determination. Local women express pride in their abilities to control themselves, recounting their travails of adjusting to the hardships of life. Most women's lives, therefore, do not feel emotionally restricted or disciplined; rather, they feel in command of their emotions. Exceptions prove the rule. When Mariyam's desire for a divorce circulated around the household where I was staying, her supposed desire for another man put her at risk of emotional and social isolation. As other women told me: "She should have kept [these feelings] in her heart."

While most young people in Gilgit-Baltistan follow the leads of their kinship networks, they still hear and share stories, from both reality and fiction, of individuals who flout the norms to pursue aberrant desires. These stories reveal a complicated set of feelings and ways of being, functioning both to push against—and to reify—gendered emotions, norms of respectability, and relationship ideals. In a mixed-gender group discussion with young adults in Gilgit's suburbs, for example, it quickly became clear that the girls present all considered sweeping passionate love to belong only to fairy tales, songs, and movies, while the boys fervently protested that everyone experiences *'ishq,* even though they themselves would never dare to exhibit it openly. To demonstrate his conviction, one young man started singing a Shina love song about the madness and purity of the state of being in love. Gazing off into the distance, another boy dreamily referenced the tales of Hir-Ranjha and Laila-Majnun.[2] Both stories are famous throughout the Indian subcontinent and have been the subjects of many lyrical and filmic adaptations. They recount the ordeals of passionate lovers, who fall in love at first sight when catching a distant view of the other's gentleness. Because of social or hierarchical obstacles, they do not have a future together, and undergo great suffering as they long for each other. Their chastity and pain are two crucial markers of *'ishq.*

The tale of Laila and Qais, who then turns into Majnun (Arabic for "crazy" or "possessed"), has its roots in seventh century Arabia. Through Persian poetry, especially Niẓami's 1192 epic, it made its way to Moghul India. Although Laila and Majnun have loved each other since their youth, Laila's father does not agree to her marrying such a passionate husband and forces her to wed another man. Majnun becomes so obsessed with unattainable Laila that he loses himself completely and resorts to wandering the desert reciting his own love poetry. "Majnun's love is represented as ultimately transcending the real, physical Layla to attain a mystical union with her idealized form" (Davis and Davis 1995, 226), a

state of mind that shows strong parallels with Sufi conceptions of the purest love for God. Through constant purification of the soul, the Sufi follower approximates the divine and annihilates himself through the complete surrender to and worship of God. Early Sufis described this as the ultimate state of *moḥabbat*. Over time, however, the concept of *'ishq* became more dominant, and people compared their long spiritual journeys to their beloved God with the devotion of a distanced lover (Schimmel 1975). This impression was reinforced by the close entanglement of Sufi and folk poetry in South Asia, where even religious figures referred to Majnun as a role "model for the mystic lover" (140).

Urdu literature, which originated from Persian during the Moghul Empire, draws its poetic language from Sufi influences as well. Love poems (*ghazals*) telling tales of passion and misery can often "be read as both profane and divine: the *'ashiq* ("the lover," can be the poet and/or a mystic), the *ma'ashooq* ("the beloved," can be human or God), concealed behind the veil" (Dwyer 2000, 40). Although the Sufi branch of Islam is historically very widespread in India and Pakistan, it has never established itself in Gilgit-Baltistan, except for some individual followers. Yet, detached from their religious origins, its ideals of mystic love are well known: Songs and Hindi movies feature simplified versions of *ghazals,* and both folk tales and pop culture from the subcontinent are popular in Gilgit. When these visions of *'ishq* are debated among women, they can both affirm norms, or reveal dissatisfaction, and, most importantly, offer a window into local ways of exercising influence to control weakness and passivity that comes with emotionality, above all with passionate love.

In Parallel Spheres

All over Gilgit-Baltistan, a parallel world of fairies (*parī*), demons (*jin* or *dev*), giants, witches, and other mystical beings coexists with the human sphere (Csáji 2011; Jettmar 1975; Marhoffer-Wolff 2002; Snoy 1975). During my fieldwork I noted countless casual comments about the existence of diverse supernatural beings, but depictions of them vary widely from region to region and tale to tale. However, all describe fairies, who are mostly feminine characters, as the fairest and lightest beings, hovering in the pure heights of the mountain tops. Their universe is thus portrayed as the inverse of the low, filthy human world at the bottom of the valleys. Fairies do things, and have feelings, that social conventions among humans do not acknowledge. In times of politically far-reaching anthropological debates on alternative, metaphysical cosmologies, and protagonists-beyond-the-human, they should be considered as serious factors contributing to the construction of lifeworlds.

Since the seven- to eight-thousand-meter-high summits of the Karakoram, Hindukush, and Himalaya ranges obstruct clear views, local cosmology refers not to wide skies or the horizon but to a vertical hierarchy—similar to *qōm* (caste)

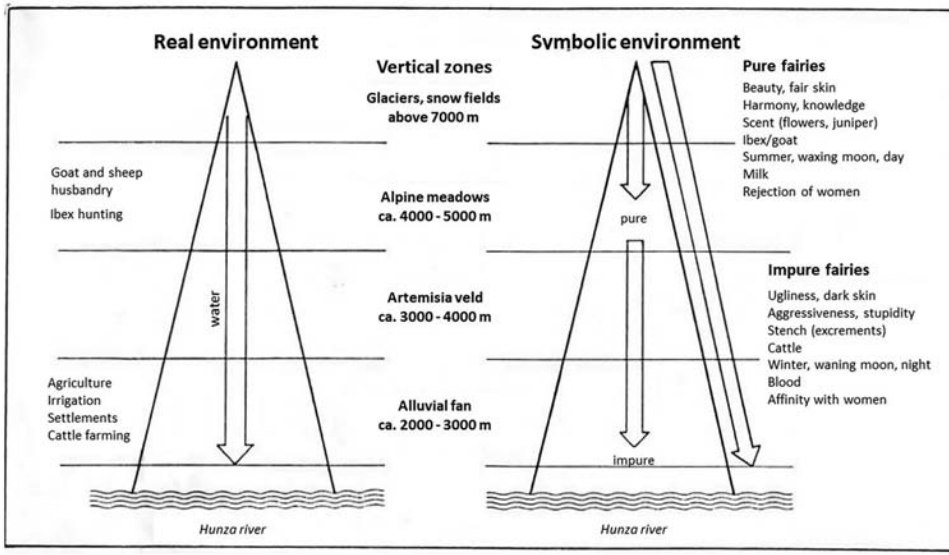


FIGURE 11 Schematic illustration of vertical classification of the environment in the Hunza Valley. Stellrecht 1992, 429, translated by the author.

hierarchies—of zones of purity: the higher in altitude, the purer and more sacred (Jettmar 1975; Stellrecht 1992). The snow-covered peaks symbolize clarity, and the flow of glacial waters from these peaks is what brings life to the arid desert below. Meanwhile, the ground is polluted by human and animal biological functions, such as excrement, menstruation, sexuality, childbirth, and death, as well as bad deeds and thoughts. Since the high pastures (*carāgāh*) in Gilgit-Baltistan are strongly associated with the reign of the fairies, the purity of these spheres is secured by mostly male shepherds, and menstruating women are not to violate them (Hewitt 1989; Jettmar 1975).

Around Gilgit, the fairies are said to live on top of Rakaposhi (7,788 m), Haramosh (7,406 m) and Nanga Parbat (8,126 m). For humans, this habitat consists only of glaciers, but the fairy world, which lies invisible behind a mental veil, is full of flowers, trees, palaces furnished with silk and gold, herds of goats, and lakes of milk in which the fairies like to bathe. Fairies serve the finest food on platters of gold, and their existence seems paradisiacal compared to the scarce environment and hardships of agricultural labor in the harsh highland terrain. Additionally, fairies love to travel and fly—sometimes alone, often with the help of a certain gown, on their golden thrones, or by means of their untied hair. To avoid attention, they might change their form into bees, wasps, or mosquitos (Marhoffer-Wolff 2002; Snoy 1975; Stellrecht 1992).

Although the fairy kingdom exists in parallel to the human world, fairies can interfere with people's lives. Despite popular admiration for fairies, stories

from such meetings often carry an element of danger or outright cruelty: crops being harmed, a man napping on a rock being kidnapped, a boy disappearing. Anyone entering fairy terrain must respect their dominion, pray to them, bring offerings, and behave considerately, for example, by not exploiting their meadows; otherwise, they will feel the fairies' wrath (Marhoffer-Wolff 2002; Sidky 1994). According to lore, the famous shaman Dudi, who took a fairy husband, even lost her own daughter when she carelessly flew through the forest with her. She arrived in her village with solely a child's dried arm in her hand. Fairies are clearly capricious, as Humayun Sidky (1994) summarized: "The *pari* appear to be the embodiment of natural forces, displaying the life-giving and life-threatening attributes of the mountains" (73). Even when people in fairy stories rightly fear these creatures, they nevertheless feel a mysterious kind of attraction, a drive to follow them if they show themselves, an inner force that takes over against their better judgment (Snoy 1975). This power over humans is akin to *'ishq*: Fairies make people surrender their willpower and, local folk tales subtly suggest, even embrace the prospect of a sexual liaison with these otherworldly beings, who are known to act out their wishes and desires with utmost confidence. Fairy women eat lavish food, seduce beautiful men, and do not care for children: They offer a counter-reality to women's lives on the ground.

Maria Marhoffer-Wolff (2002) has written insightfully about female mediums in the Yasin Valley of Gilgit-Baltistan who are involved in relationships with fairy men. On one of their explorations of the mountain sites fairy men sometimes fall in love with beautiful young women who are then succinctly seduced by the fairy's beauty and by the luxuries of the fairy kingdom, where the men take them for short journeys, some only in their dreams, others in more intense states of possession. Independent of kinship obligations or consideration of the more practical qualities her parents would look for in a potential spouse, the girl then decides to marry her fairy beau on emotional grounds. While these relationships represent a glaring transgression of social and status boundaries between humans and fairies, they provide a few women with access to wisdom and knowledge of the supernatural world, a spiritual transcendence they use for fortune telling, or to solve other personal problems in their villages. To counter violent interventions or social isolation that often accompanies passionate love, many people draw on divine assistance and consult mediums to influence their destiny.

In the pursuit to understand vernacular epistemology, a fairy tale seems an appropriate backdrop for an exploration of local conceptualizations of love and emotions. The only such fable ever told to me spontaneously was that of Husun Bano; one of my good friends, a middle-aged woman, tried to recall what she had once heard. Weeks later, in one of my infrequent searches in Gilgit's few bookshops, I came across a printed version of the tale collected and published by the *Shina Language and Culture Promotion Society*, a local initiative under the

leadership of Shakil Ahmed Shakil. The book *Didī Shiloke* contains the fairy tale in the original Shina,[3] as well as an Urdu version. When working my way through the story, I realized that my friend might have shortened the journey of the protagonist a bit and left out some aspects; her emphasis lay on the underlying love plot of a human prince falling in love with a fairy. As the open and flexible character of oral traditions allows for the existence of countless variations on Husun Bano's story, I follow my friend's example and streamline its extensive plot. To reflect local storytelling, I have left my translation as close as possible to the original Urdu sentences and synchronized some passages with phrases used in the Shina version with the help of my research assistant.

A long, long time ago there was a king who had no children. When, finally, his only son was born, he was very worried and protective. When Behram turned fifteen, he pressured his parents to allow him to leave the palace for the first time. So, the king decided that it would be a good time to celebrate Behram's birthday and gathered his people. Since morning, the cooks had been preparing food and the guests were eating. When instruments were being played, a horse with a golden saddle started running wild on the polo grounds.[4] Because no one could catch the horse, Prince Behram jumped onto the polo grounds himself and succeeded in mounting it. As soon as Behram sat on the horse, it started running so fast that it lifted into the air. In a blink of an eye he disappeared from the site. The king and his people were shocked.

In one flight the horse took Behram to its world. Once they arrived, the horse changed its outer shape and appeared in front of Behram in his true form as a demon (*dev*). "Why did you separate me from my parents?" Behram asked. In his palace the demon gave Behram a royal welcome (*khāṭr madārat*) and advised him: "See Behram, from today on you are my son. All of my possessions, my wealth, and my life are yours. You don't have to worry about anything. Eat whatever you want and drink whatever you want. No one is here to stop you. This kingdom is yours from today on and you are the owner of it." After this advice he took Behram with him and showed him the whole palace.

One day, while walking around the palace, Behram went a little farther than usual and reached a point where his whole sight was taken up by a huge fort. But its main entrance was locked from both sides. "There must be a secret in the fort, that's why he didn't give the keys to me." When the demon came home Behram insisted: "You gave me the keys to the whole palace. But why haven't you given me the keys to the fort?" "I only kept them because I didn't want you to know the secret that is hidden there. But if you want to have the keys then take them." Then he told Behram the whole story: "I built beautiful gardens, a pool to swim in, and a beautiful palace inside it. Son, actually I am in love[5] with Husun Bano, the daughter of the fairy king of Lilm. She comes there with her sisters and friends for outings. But it's my bad luck that I couldn't attract her. Having failed to get her, I separated you from your parents because the priests

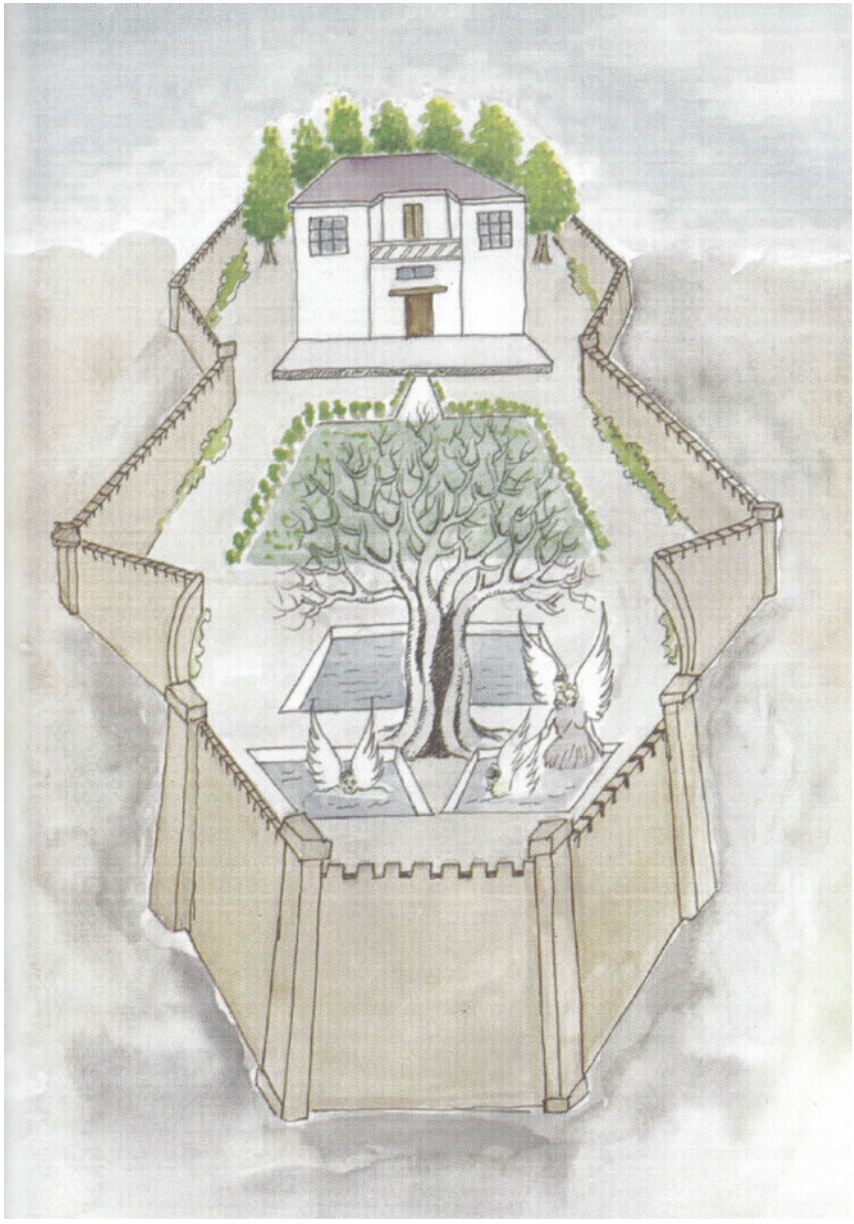


FIGURE 12 Painted illustration of Ḥusun Bāno's story taken from the book *Didī Shiloke* (Shakil 2008).

told me that you and Husun Bano have the same skin color and beauty. That's why I brought you here, my son." Behram asked the demon: "Oh father, what if I attract Husun Bano toward me?" "Oh son, it's your fate, but I must say that it is a very difficult task. Don't fall for these insincere fairies like me."

Early morning the next day, when the demon left for hunting, Behram went out to discover the secrets of the fort. After reaching the fort, he saw the gardens, lawns, and ponds and looked at the palace in detail. Precisely in the middle of the ponds there was an old hollow poplar tree. "What could be the reason to leave this old, dead poplar tree among the beautiful ponds?" Then Behram went closer to it and inspected it from all sides. He went in to see its hollow stem from the inside. Then a swarm of mosquitoes appeared from somewhere and spread all over the fort. The mosquitoes inspected the area and when they were satisfied that no one was there, they came to the pond [and corporealized]. These were the same fairies about whom the demon had told him. Among them were also Husun Bano and her sisters. Behram very silently stayed in his hide-out. He could see and hear them well from the hollow stem. After swimming for a long time, the fairies went toward the palace. A tablecloth (*dastarkẖān*) was spread for them there. They had food and continued their chit-chat. While they were busy talking, Behram came out of the hollow stem and without wasting a moment picked up Husun Bano's flying dress, went back into the banyan tree, and waited.

When the fairies came to put their flying dresses on at the edge of the pond, they realized Husun Bano's dress was missing. The fairies were furious and searched each and every corner of the palace as mosquitoes but could not find her dress. Even when they attacked the palace by turning into fire balls, they could not find anything. Because the fairies were upset, they sat down next to a wall and started weeping. Husun Bano guessed that her dress was stolen by a demon. That is why she talked to her sisters and asked them to leave the place immediately. Her sisters and the friends left her in tears. Right after they were gone, Behram came out of the banyan tree and walked toward Husun Bano. When she saw Behram, she was astonished. After some time, she recollected herself and asked Behram: "Have you stolen my clothes?" Behram said to her: "Yes, I have." She asked him with a smile: "Why did you steal my clothes?" Behram said: "*Bas, merī marẓī* (Because it's my will)." Then Behram asked her to walk a little. Without saying anything Husun Bano started walking ahead of him. To overcome her reserve, Behram started talking to her. Behram's soft-heartedness and good looks made Husun Bano flush. This enhanced her own beauty even more. But Behram's words had provoked her to talk. They had a long conversation and got to know each other's dispositions (*ṭabī'at*). To relax Husun Bano, Behram said in a funny way: "You should be thankful that the demon has not touched you." "But I have been touched by you," she also replied in a humorous way and put her hand on his hand. Behram put his other hand on her hand and said: "I believe that now no one can take you away from me." After finding each

other Behram and Husun Bano were infinitely happy and they never wanted to be separate again.

Behram said to Husun Bano: "Now is the time for my uncle to come back. I will convince him and will also arrange a meeting with you." When the demon arrived, Behram said to him: "Father (*bābā*), I have brought Husun Bano here." "No, it's not true." The demon was stunned. After a few moments he got back into his senses and applauded Behram: "Oh son, you are so talented, bravo (*vāh*)." The demon stepped forward, put his hand over Husun Bano's head [a gesture expressing good will and blessing the other person] and enquired about her well-being. Then he said to her: "My daughter! This is your home. This property and all my belongings are yours and Behram's. Now you can use it the way you want. This is all yours." Behram and Husun Bano enjoyed their time at the demon's, but, after a while, Behram felt a deep sadness and was missing his parents. He shared one of his dreams with Husun Bano: "It seems to me as if my parents and our people have fallen into trouble. My heart is telling me that our country has been attacked." Behram said to her that they would get permission from the demon and go to his country. When the demon came back at night, Behram took the hunted meat off his back and carried it into the palace. Then Husun Bano served food to them and Behram told the demon about his dream: "Father! Allow us to go, this is everything we want." After thinking for a little while, the demon agreed.

The night before their departure, the demon provided Behram and Husun Bano with some of his hair. He said: "If you are confronted with any trouble on the way, burn this hair and I will reach there in the same moment." The next morning, he sent them off on a flying wooden bench (*takhta*). The demon's guards accompanied them to the border of his territory. From there they continued the journey on horses until they reached the border of Behram's country. There they found a house to have some rest. The house was owned by an old lady. Leaving Husun Bano behind, Behram went to a nearby place to hunt. After Behram left, Husun Bano wanted to comb her hair. She got up to get a comb and mirror from her trunk. As she opened the chest, she saw her flying dress which she had lost at the pool of the demon's palace. When she had finished combing her hair, some men appeared outside. They started looking into the house, saw Husun Bano there and wanted to kidnap her. When they tried to enter the house forcefully, Husun Bano quickly put on her flying dress and took off. Sitting on the roof she said to her host: "Oh old lady! When Behram returns, tell him that I have gone to Lilm. If he wants to come to me, he should come to Lilm." Then she flew and vanished from sight.

In the evening, Behram returned to the old lady's home with his prey but Husun Bano was not there. The old lady gave Husun Bano's message to him. Without wasting any time, Behram set fire to the demon's hair. The demon appeared and Behram told him the whole story: "Father! I have the firm plan to

go to Lilm. Now you have to find a way for me to go there." The demon encouraged Behram and gave him a handkerchief: "After my territory, my younger sister's kingdom starts. Once you reach there, give her this handkerchief, and quickly start sucking her right breast [to demonstrate the adoption as "milk-kin"[6]). She is called the big-breast-queen. She will surely find a way for you."

The next day, the demon's guards took Behram on the flying seat (*takhta*) to the border of the demon's territory. From there he walked very fast and reached the queen's palace in five days. When Behram saw her, he quickly headed for the queen and started drinking milk from her right breast. The queen screamed: "Oh, which of my brother's or sister's sons are you?" Behram presented her the handkerchief given by the demon and she kissed his forehead and let him sit next to her. Behram told her the whole story. She gave him a royal welcome and assured that there are some old people in the land of wolves who have information about the way to Lilm. The next day the big-breast-queen gave Behram half a yard of rope and a bottle of kohl (*kajal*) as a present and explained: "Son! If you want to climb down a canyon, this rope will extend automatically and take you down. After applying this kohl to one's eyes, one can see even in a pitch-black night like in bright day." Behram started walking from there and reached the kingdom of the wolves within a few days.

There he hunted some sparrows, prepared a particularly good barbecue, and went to the wolf king. The king hastily picked a sparrow and put it in his mouth. He said: "*Vāh*, what a pleasure!" Admiring Behram, the king asked his reason for coming and Behram conveyed his whole story. The king advised his ministers to bring old Yarku to the palace. When the king asked the old man for the way to Lilm, he said: "Oh Lord, I heard from my ancestors that there is a cave on the peak of the Khum Mountain out of which mosquitoes often fly. On the other side of this cave is Lilm." On the next day the king gifted Behram a cap and a leather mat. Then he said to him: "Son! The characteristic of this cap is that when you wear it no one can see you. If you spread this leather mat on any lake or river and sit on it, you can cross it." Then he saw Behram off on his way to Lilm.

After travelling for one month, he reached the bottom of the Khum Mountain [possibly referring to Khumbu, in the Everest region]. From there he slowly started climbing the mountain. After about twenty days he reached the cave tunnel and applied the kohl given to him by the big-breast-queen to see everything in its pitch-black darkness. On the other side the cave opened into a very deep canyon. At the base of the canyon a huge river was flowing. Directly underneath the cave's opening there was a tree with unripe apricots. Behram took the piece of rope from his bag and tied it to one branch of the tree. Then he grabbed the other end of the rope and climbed down. After coming down he spread the leather mat he had received from the wolves' king on the riverbank. As he sat on the mat it took him to the other side of the river within a few moments. He had arrived in Lilm. When he reached the capital of Lilm, he put on the cap

given to him by the wolves' king, so no one was able to see him and started searching for Husun Bano. To get familiar with the palace's affairs he entered the kitchen. There Husun Bano's food was being prepared. When Husun Bano's nanny (*āyā*) left the kitchen with the food, he followed her. Behram did not know that Husun Bano's father had imprisoned her. Out of fear and to save themselves, her friends, who had gone to the demon's garden with her, had concealed the truth and had said that Husun Bano had met a human being and left them. He was terribly angry with her.

Husun Bano's *āyā* stopped in front of a room in the palace. The guards who were standing there opened the door and Behram entered behind her. The *āyā* put the food on the table and said to Husun Bano: "Get up, daughter! Have some food." But she refused to eat. The nanny left and Husun Bano laid down on her bed. Behram could not see her in this state and took off his cap. As Husun Bano saw Behram, she screamed: "Oh, what have you done?" Behram said: "See, I've come!" Husun Bano called the nanny to bring really good food. Her *āyā* was very surprised to hear this request and quickly came back with very well-prepared food. Husun Bano said to her: "Mother (*ammā*), leave the food here. I will eat after a while." Once she had left, Behram took off his cap and Husun Bano leaped up to hug him. Holding him she cried for a long time. Then she washed his hands and put the food in front of him. They happily ate together. Later Behram asked Husun Bano: "Who gave you permission to go back to Lilm?" Husun Bano did not have an answer to Behram's question. She lowered her head in embarrassment and looked at Behram with apologizing eyes. Behram asked Husun Bano again: "Why did you leave? Why are you not answering my questions?" Husun Bano was already feeling sorry for her mistake and Behram's question added to her grief; her eyes filled with tears. When he saw her tears, Behram could not control himself. He took Husun Bano's hands and said to her gently: "Husun Bano, you are mine. That's why I came here after travelling deserts and forests." Husun Bano hugged Behram and started crying heavily. Then Behram calmed her and said: "Don't worry. You will see that your father will free you very soon, and he will regret this act." Husun Bano relaxed and was infinitely happy to have Behram in Lilm.

They spent many days hiding from her family. And Husun Bano became livelier day by day. One day her nanny asked her: "Daughter, what is the reason that you seem so happy these days and become more beautiful day by day? I'm like your mother and I have raised you with love and care, so there is no need to keep secrets from me." Husun Bano started laughing and continuing to laugh said to her *āyā*: "Oh mother! What happened to you? How and what kind of happiness? Show it to me." "My daughter. No matter if you admit it or not, your face is telling it. Don't hide it from me, tell me," her nanny kept on pressing further. Husun Bano said to her: "First promise me that you will not share this with anyone. Then I will tell you." She swore not to tell anybody. Then Husun Bano said to her nanny:

"Mother, see here! The secret of my happiness." When she said that, Behram took the cap off his head. The moment she saw him, she fainted. After a little while she came back to consciousness, got up slowly and greeted Behram by kissing his hands [a local gesture of greeting]. Husun Bano asked her: "Mother, tell me, did I do something wrong?" "Daughter! Those who would think so are senseless. In all of Lilm I have never seen such a handsome and beautiful young person. See, as a couple you are two sides of the same coin." Saying this she spit over Husun Bano's shoulder to protect them from bad luck.

After some time, she went off straight to the queen. When meeting her she said to her: "Sister! If you promise me that you would not say anything to Husun Bano I will tell you something." The queen swore smirkingly, and the nanny said to her: "I've just come from seeing Behram with Husun Bano," and told her the whole story. The queen was shocked and said to her: "Oh sister! What is she saying? How is it possible that a human being can enter Lilm?" For a long time, she was lost in her thoughts. "From the beginning my heart was convinced that an intelligent girl like Husun Bano can do no wrong. He must be a god (*devta*)." Then the queen added: "Ok, let's go, let's see them." So, the nanny took her to Husun Bano. When Behram took off his cap and saluted the queen, she was unable to react. After some time, she got up, kissed the hands of Behram, and said: "Son, I'm so happy to see you. Now wait for two, three days. I will talk to your father and find a way out." Saying that she left thinking how she should tell this news to Lilm's king.

At night the queen tried to talk to her husband about Husun Bano. The king said amused: "See, how mother and daughter make plans without telling me. What bigger deceit than this can there be?" The queen insisted: "I know that he is not a man but a god. Once you meet him you will immediately recognize it." When king and queen reached their room, Behram and Husun Bano got up and fell to their knees. The king was surprised to see Behram and had the feeling that he was a god. He hugged Behram and said: "Son! We have given you two a hard time without any reason." Then the king asked Behram about his parents, so he told him his whole story. The king expressed his sympathies to him and said: "Son! You really suffered a lot. Let's go to the palace so that you could have some rest." After a few days, the king threw a wedding banquet (*valīma*). After having their first child, Behram and Husun Bano went back to free Behram's kingdom from an invading army and continued to live peacefully with his parents.

The overall frameworks in the story—of family structure, gender roles, and courtship—closely resemble human practices, but the protagonists' (re)actions clearly differ from the behavior of socially more restricted Gilgitis. Without much resistance the fairy princess Husun Bano lets herself be "touched" by a beautiful young boy, and even her parents quickly surrender to Behram's allure. The fact that everyone involved readily comes to the aid of the lovers suggests

that, rather than allowing *'ishq* to manipulate him into irrational behaviors, Behram himself embodies *'ishq*. Of course, his venture to pursue his lover is all-encompassing and energy-absorbing, but more importantly, he drains others of their willpower and has even powerful rulers and fairies under his spell. While a desperate, *'ishq*-stricken lover would be consumed by his lonely longing, Behram actively approaches and tackles every new challenge with complete success.

Although I heard this folk tale from a friend, she said she originally got it from her grandfather. Indeed, known storytellers are usually older men. Husun Bano's story should therefore not be read as necessarily reflecting women's hidden protests against patriarchy, in a kind of triumph of passionate love over their own complicity with the system of arranged marriage. Nor can we easily see it as release valve that channels frustration without challenging the overall system of subordination, as Gloria Raheja and Anna Gold (1994) conclude in their analysis of songs and speech acts in North India. Such analyses risk making us believe that women are wholly passive or even infantile, only able to work out their beliefs in imaginary realms. Instead, the story, and Marhoffer-Wolff's examples of actual human-fairy marriages even more so, shows that some men and women make a joint effort to legitimize their love. And although people would not act in the ways Husun Bano and Behram do, listeners of the tale might see in the storylines the existence of certain desires they know too. They find a framework to comprehend or classify their own feelings, or even rare cases of nonconformity. That the published version of Husun Bano's story does not even describe or name the emotion between her and Behram mirrors the relatively fuzzy and secondary existence of love as a feeling rather than an active practice of kin-making in the local epistemology. Mutual affection is only indicated through phrases such as "[they] were infinitely happy." Since the Shina and Urdu term for "happiness" (*kẖūsh*), is the same as the word for "love" in Shina, it has the effect of deintensifying the couple's passion.

Losing Control, On and Off Screen

In the same way that traditional folktales can both represent and shape people's emotional framework, popular culture both reflects and influences their attitudes toward relationships and love. As in the story of Laila and Majnun, Bollywood films, which are very popular in Pakistan, usually show a male hero falling in love at first sight (*ānkh milānā*—the meeting of eyes) with a beautiful, graceful, innocent, and gentle woman—in short, a woman who adheres to traditional values of modesty (Lau 2006). The female lead has "long hair, big eyes, [. . .] round face, and [. . .] small, slim but curvaceous body" (Dwyer 2014, 188), and most movie stars are very fair, with light hair and skin, and often also greenish-grayish eyes. The beauty ideal indicates social hierarchies of skin color and singles out the actors from the majority of people in South Asia. It suggests a

parallel world, akin to that of the fairies, which needs not to be taken as factual, but nonetheless affects people's consciousness.

The masculine hero of a film is typically of the younger generation, often a loner or misfit who struggles to establish himself by going his own way, and fighting with his father or potential father-in-law who want him to follow norms he would prefer to flout. Reflecting South Asian gender stereotypes, the girl of his dreams is obedient and shy, so she does not easily plunge into a relationship with the hero. Being emotionally expressive, the lover, however, is devoted to the woman, even after being rejected, and often displays fanatical stalking behavior (Dwyer 2014), not entirely unlike Behram's committed pursuit of Husun Bano. Steve Derné (2000) delineates that in several older Indian films, men simply take women by force, and instead of fighting back, the heroine falls in love with her stalker. Many men, on as well as off screen, seem to have the strong belief that once a woman realizes how much he adores her, she will return his feelings: *'ishq* justifies harassment and at the same time is supposed to lay the foundation for mutual love. The South Asian film industry further reaffirms these gender stereotypes with playful, erotic dancing scenes, in which female bodies only exist for the pleasure of the masculine audience (Derné 2000). Behram, too, gazes at Husun Bano from afar. He does not show any sign of remorse for stealing her clothes, and his deceit is a sign of his intelligence and power: He tricks her into coming near her, and her own will is not an issue. The man chases the girl, who then surrenders to his advances, yet his righteousness is never questioned. The only difference between the folktale and the relationships in Bollywood films is that the fairy princess is far from being shy and intimidated.

What is true for films and fairy tales also applies to real social settings, if not always in such an exaggerated way: Since women are expected to be passive, it is up to men to pursue them. To win a woman's heart, a man must take the initiative. Some boys make romantic advances, such as giving a gift, and while girls mostly do not reciprocate, their acceptance of the offering suggests a form of consent. Social norms and embodied modesty prevent them from saying "yes," even if they like a boy, so refusal is not taken as a "no.". But in real life, as in Bollywood, a woman only gives in to a man's courting efforts when she is confident that he will take on responsibility for her and their relationship (Lau 2006). This commitment is the most important quality in a husband, and women in the area of Gilgit showed their appreciation of committed husbands with the compliment: "He takes good care of her."

Husun Bano has similar values. Early in the story of their love, when the would-be-kidnappers come to take her, she is not willing to sacrifice everything for the higher cause of her love for Behram, and secures her own safety, returning to her parents' home. But once Behram has proven himself and his commitment, she becomes more submissive and eventually returns with him, as human custom demands, to his family's home. Such stories suggest that, although it

might precipitate the male hero into a long quest involving great suffering, women's passivity and self-protection often prevent greater damage. Women's mastery of the techniques of guarding their heart from *'ishq* can be seen as a way to subvert the patriarchal gender ideology: women are goddesses, who resist seduction and enslave men. Women's power rests in their moral superiority, and they are well aware of that, as shown, for example, when they raise an eyebrow at stories of "crazy" longing men.

Consequently, love stories do not always end happily. Stories of lovesick men, who forget themselves and go insane (*vo mukamal pāgal ho gīā*) are not uncommon in the area of Gilgit. Young men who directed all their emotional desire onto a woman they cannot reach might even develop physical symptoms of heartbreak, such as restlessness, weight loss, shivering, or absentmindedness (cf. Davis & Davis 1995). Interestingly, they are treated with lenience, for *'ishq* is conceptualized as taking over their agency. This absolves the individual of responsibility and allows him some degree of freedom. In one case I got to know about, the desperate lover, whose adored was married to someone else, tried to commit suicide several times, tyrannized his parents, whom he blamed for not having married him to his beloved earlier on, stole his family's money, gambled it away, and even used black magic to curse the woman he loved to prevent her developing affection for her husband. Only after some months did one of his older cousins manage to reason with him to set his hopeless love free, and to open the magic lock that had closed her heart to the other man.

Nevertheless, his escapades went on for years, even after he himself was married and had children. Although the man acted contrary to conventional ways of behavior, he never suffered complete social isolation; some people pitied him for not being in full possession of his wits, others even admired his dedication. In Gilgit, such misconduct does not reflect too poorly on men's families; the honor of a man can only be destroyed by addiction to alcohol or hashish, not by matters of passionate love (Gratz 2006). Moreover, most men who have experienced a fervent passion for a woman end up compromising, learning to accept the choices of their parents. An older uncle from the village told me how thankful he now was that he had been prevented from following the call of his heart as a young adult. Blinded by his passion, he had not realized how different he and his former sweetheart had been, she coming from an urban family while he had to take over the family farm in the village. He now appreciates his wife, who has proved to be a perfect match: "Allah meant it well with me, destiny turned out well."

In Gilgit-Baltistan, and in Muslim societies more broadly, first love is often celebrated for its purity and innocence precisely because it is naively unconstrained by reason (Schielke 2015, 51). Religious, regional, and class differences are the most common barriers to the matches longed for by some young people. A frequent problem for Gilgiti boys is that, while they are still finishing their

education and looking for proper jobs, girls their age get married to older husbands whose careers are more firmly established. Almost every man with whom I talked at length could tell a story from his early twenties about how he had adored his childhood neighbor, a school friend's sister, or a girl he saw in college. Most girls do not actively reciprocate boys' advances, however, and due to social conventions of gender segregation, men told me, they hardly ever had the opportunity to talk with their beloveds, at most exchanging flirtatious looks. Admired from a distance, the girl might be unaware of his sentiments, yet the young man associates all his desires with her. Some men still idealize a girl they remember from their youth all their lives. Women seem to be the screen on which men project an image and nostalgically sketch the glorified memories of their youth.

When attending university in Gilgit, Hassan fell in love with Gul, one of his classmates. He is a Shia from the city, she an Ismaili from a rural valley, staying with relatives in Gilgit. As they were both well aware of the social incompatibility of their different backgrounds, they mainly kept in touch through their mobile phones. When Gul finished her degree and went on to Rawalpindi for further studies; Hassan, who did not have good enough grades for college, followed her, with the excuse of needing to visit his uncle in neighboring Islamabad. As the years went by, the pressure from their families to find a suitable spouse intensified. When Hassan took me into his confidence, I sensed he wanted to share the burden of his misery with someone who valued romance as a precursor to marriage. To my surprise, even he as a man, who would not need to hide his feelings, did not even want to try to talk to anyone in his family because he did not know how to tell them that he was wasting his time (as well as their resources for his stay in the Punjab). Besides, he was aware his parents could not approach complete strangers—which Gul's parents were—with a proposal of marriage. Being so outspoken about his stoic suffering implied a certain degree of contention with cultivating his passion for Gul from afar. Gul herself was more reserved and went on with her life, eventually consenting to a match her parents arranged for her.

Even after her engagement, Hassan kept up his occasional visits to her all-girls student hostel, where they would meet for a five-minute chat outside the main gate, and he would hand her little gifts like sweets, a shawl, or mobile phone *balance* (credit). Accompanying Hassan to one of these meetings, I felt like the watchful chaperone standing next to them. Whenever she glanced up at him from her seemingly detached posture, slumped and two meters away from him, he would try, nervously, to hold her gaze; completely absorbed in this flirtatious game, they hardly noticed my presence. Afterwards, Hassan cheerfully boasted that I had to acknowledge that she returned his feelings and obviously did not care for her future husband. I feared that Hassan might mythologize their connection long after Gul would find herself busy with a household and children.

When I returned to Pakistan the next year, Hassan had moved back to his family home in Gilgit. Although he still did not appear to have made any effort to take up a profession, he was just getting engaged. Struggling to suppress his tears, he told me that his father had become very sick over the winter and had to have heart surgery; at his bedside, his father asked Hassan to fulfill his last wish and consent to a marriage proposal his parents had been negotiating for him. Maybe Hassan's parents suspected his prior attachment and used the situation for leverage. Though deeply grateful that his beloved father had survived the medical treatment, Hassan was now left trying to juggle his different involvement with two women at the same time. While he was getting to know his future wife over the phone and was frequently sent to run errands for her, like taking her shopping for college supplies, he was still in touch with Gul. When, veiling Hassan's identity, I talked to one of my friends about the moral implications of such double-faced behavior, she swept away my worries with a smiling gesture and simply said: "Why should his wife be jealous? The other girl is so far away."

A man's idealized image of another girl might not seem threatening because his advances usually do not aim at any physical interaction. Charles Lindholm (2008) remarks that for Pakhtun lovers in northern Pakistan, romantic love is "pure" and cannot be consummated; polluting acts of sexuality would automatically end the spiritual quest for an unreachable ideal. *'Ishq*—sacred, mystical, suffused with longing—stands in stark contrast to the composure and ordinariness of marriage, which, recommended by God, is at the core of Islamic social life. Since sexual intercourse is only to take place between spouses, sexuality has become associated with marriage and procreation. The passionate lover's fascination with the god-like beloved draws its authority from worshipping not just her, but the purity of the relationship itself. Hassan's admiration for Gul might have lost its bittersweet power if it actually had materialized into marriage. If the girl accepts the lover, she might lose part of her attraction: her unattainable divinity.

Even Bollywood keeps the sexual separate from the actual plot of protagonists' lives, by restricting erotics to songs and dance scenes. These sequences are not taken as real, but symbolize daydreams, or are simply fantastic, emotionally powerful music videos. Along with the typically flirtatious, fast-paced hits that girls enjoyed dancing to, one of the most famous Bollywood songs in Gilgit in 2014 was the sad love tune *Tum hi ho* from the film *Aashiqui 2* (2013).[7] Its lyrics translate: "Because there's only you, now only you, you're my life, my peace, my pain, now my love, there's only you," lines that boys, even more than young women, dreamily crooned to themselves when doing their homework or walking to the next market stall. The majority of Bollywood songs, in Hindi or Urdu, relate to love in its various forms. More than films' plots, the songs carve their way into public consciousness, as short sequences that people, like my

interlocutors, transfer from phone to phone. Some of the young women I watched films with even fast-forwarded the erotic dancing scenes, either because they felt intimidated by their bluntness or because they regarded them as indecent; nevertheless, most girls listened to the songs afterwards. In her research on Bollywood movies, Rachel Dwyer (2014) identifies these love themes as a great source of imagination for the audience:

> Hindi film has a whole language of love and romance which has set the model for ways in which romance is imagined and emulated in real life. While the beauty of the stars may not be achievable and travel to the exotic locations may be beyond most people's budgets, elements such as the poetry, sounds and language, and the film's style and manner, can be copied and referenced. The films' ideals of romance skillfully drawn on existing traditions and social customs as well as adding a new twist to create a fantasy of who would be romancing whom, where and how; what to do and what to say. (192)

Although the booming South Asian film and TV industry increasingly portrays cosmopolitan lifestyles, it does not defy the social circumstances of their audiences and captures the aspiring middle classes' struggle to remain South Asian "at heart" (Sarkar 2008, 34). Since the 1990s, acquiescence has been a prominent theme. Protagonists tend to fall passionately in love in the beginning of the film but then work to restore a harmonious state of "traditional" ideals where happiness derives from the bigger family setup, including parental wishes (Chowdhry 2007; Dwyer 2014; Lau 2006). Whereas Western cinema often deals with the individual's inner emotional struggles, Bollywood plots frame the self as a product of interpersonal negotiations. The protagonists assert their own opinions and perspectives, but they evaluate them with respect to relationship dynamics, not interior moral benchmarks—reminiscent of Ahmed's model of emotions.

The happy matches that culminate the films reflect the audiences' growing desires for a loving, companionate relationship within the framework of arranged marriage. The plots offer a wide variety of models, from marriages of childhood friends, whose families have always been very close, and who fall in love when they return back home after acquiring an education, to good friends who hardly notice how much they like each other within the wider friend circle, to arranged couples who may even have been hostile in the beginning (Dwyer 2014). Not all these plots begin with mutual *'ishq,* but they end with a socially acceptable marriage that balances the needs of both individuals and kinship groups. However, in her monograph *Conjugations* (2011), Sangita Gopal observes a trend in the new movie genres of horror, gangster, or multiplot films that are gaining popularity: Romance here takes merely the role of a supporting act, and problems arise more from postnuptial vicissitudes than external obstacles.

"Miscommunication, distrust, extramarital attractions and affairs, nervous disorders, psychic possession are internal events that mark the couple as a distinct and separate entity" (18). Bollywood reflects social shifts toward a focus on and psychologization of the marital relationship.

Similarly, Indian and Pakistani television shows offer viewers different, but overlapping, views of love and marriage. At the time of my fieldwork in 2014 and 2015, most of my close friends preferred Indian over Pakistani dramas and regularly watched *Saath Nibhaana Saathiya* (Stay with me, my love), *Diya Aur Baati Hum* (You are the lamp and I am the wick), and *Meri Aashiqui Tum Se Hi* (My love is only with you) on Star Plus or Colors TV via satellite dish.[8] Whether the context is Hindu or Muslim, the motifs and content of most of these South Asian TV dramas resonate with audiences throughout the subcontinent. They revolve around similar topics: domestic quarrels, obstacles to impulsive, passionate love, social entanglements of arranged marriages, conflicts between wives and their in-laws, and middle-class privileges or precarities (Khoja-Moolji 2018; Billaud 2015). Although there is some room for social critique, and although women in Pakistani TV programs do sometimes become complex characters, the general tendency is to portray them as ideal, educated subjects who contribute to the status of the family (Khoja-Moolji 2018). Purnima Mankekar (2004) came to a similar conclusion about the conservatism of Indian soap operas: though women on these shows may defy parental advice or social restrictions by engaging in premarital or extramarital affairs, they end up paying for their careless actions, are left alone, or are driven into some other crisis. Also many Pakistani TV plots spotlight the triumph of moral decorum over transgressive behavior by contrasting an entirely good, obedient, and devoted mother or wife with an arrogant, dominant, and selfish woman (Zia 1994). The shows code such women as belonging to the upper classes, which are contaminated by Western—in the Pakistani context, un-Islamic—ideas, something immoral and at the same time fascinating.

Fervent, self-negating *'ishq* features with varying degrees of prominence in folk tales, films, and TV dramas, which both shape and are shaped by people's imaginations, desires, and everyday life. Although men are readier to submit to such passionate love than women, who learn not to surrender their agency to emotions, there are always exceptions. When women actively pursue love and desire, whether that involves eloping with their chosen partner, exerting pressure by attempting to kill themselves in despair, or taking destiny into their own hands with help from a shaman, they reveal the solidity of the boundaries they cross.

The Danger of Elopements

Given the tight framework of social surveillance, the chances that a love affair between two unmarried people would be discovered are high. Some of the young

people I talked with said it would be more feasible to run away than to subtly convince their families to secure their marriages with their chosen spouse. As Marsden (2007b) generalizes for Chitral, couples who elope usually do so because they come from two supposedly incompatible cultural backgrounds, such as different castes, religions, or economic and social statuses. Families would never match them up, so couples with grave social backgrounds indicate a high degree of intervention by the lovers themselves and challenge the collective family ideal. Such relations are even perceived to be antisocial as families from different backgrounds face difficulties integrating with each other in the mutual kinship practices that usually accompany marriages (Mody 2008). In Gilgit, elopements most commonly happen because of cross-sectarian love. As a consequence of sectarian tensions over the last thirty years, intermarriages between the different sects of Islam, Sunni, Shia, and Ismaili, have declined drastically; their previous existence, however, openly parades a bond based on attraction rather than endogamy or lineage solidarity. Today, hardly any family would condone a marriage between a Sunni and Shia or between an Ismaili and Sunni, and although Shia and Ismaili are both theologically ascribed to the Shia denomination of Islam, matches between these two sects have become extremely rare too. Any other difference, including significant socio-economic obstacles, is easier to justify than belonging to different sects, let alone religions (cf. Smith 2020).

Although private lives in Gilgit are largely segregated along sectarian lines, people from different sects can still encounter one another in schools or the local university, at bazaars, and on main roads. Ifra, a young, educated girl from an Ismaili family, with whom I was friends, fell in love with a Sunni boy on their daily commutes to college. They saw each other from afar and started exchanging flirtatious looks before managing to exchange mobile phone numbers through mutual friends. After many months of secret and intimate messages, they told their families that they wanted to get married. Their wish was met with lack of understanding from both sides. The boy's family was reluctant to take on a girl of "loose" character who had attached herself without her parent's consent, let alone one from the Ismaili sect, whom they perceived as morally lax. The girl's family, for their part, worried about her fate: A wife moves into her husband's house, so she would be alone in an unfamiliar environment. To express the sincerity of her love, as well as her despair at being apart from her beloved, and to put pressure on her family, Ifra took rat poison. She almost died and had to be treated in hospital for nearly a week.

Her father almost broke with Ifra over the public scandal she had created. In the first days at home, she was still very stubborn with her family and was threatening to run away with her beloved. Ifra's sisters, who nursed her through her recovery, sought to persuade her that elopement was not a good idea. Their main argument was that if Ifra eloped, she would never have a secure standing in her new family, even if she were to give birth to a son. Without kinship ties



FIGURE 13 Young village woman with her mobile phone.

Photo by the author.

she would not be protected. In the best-case scenario, in which her husband or in-laws treated her comparatively well, they would still see her as shameless, and would suspect her of committing another emotionally driven, careless crime. Ifra's beloved, however, fought for her. The text messages she received from him and shared with me included desperate lines like, "I would have happily taken the poison from your hands and drunk it." His friends reported that his loss had driven him insane: He was absent-minded and did not eat enough. Ifra, on the other hand, increasingly kept her phone switched off; she seemed just too weak to do anything but convalesce. The contact between the lovers was fading. Many months later, she told me that she had secretly always been afraid of the stricter rules for veiling and gender segregation in Sunni families. With time, she recognized that her parents' concerns were for her own good because someone who falls under the sway of *'ishq* forgets everything around herself and does not consider whether she could actually live with the partner or his family for the rest of her life. The marriage that follows an elopement might work out for some time, but she had come to believe that problems were inevitable. She consoled herself: "In the beginning there is a lot of love between both; after a few years only fighting."

Unmarried girls who act out of love are commonly depicted as selfish; consequently, they have to suffer from the situation that they brought upon themselves. If a girl's secret mobile love affair is revealed, for example, when it leads to an elopement, it is clear that she has failed to embody *sharm*. She might be pitied as very young, innocent, and prone to romantic delusions but, at the same time, she will be denounced as highly egoistic and imprudent. To secure her "personal choice" (*apnī marẓī*), she will have acted against her parents without considering any consequences for herself or her family. Many adults know that falling in love is a normal part of young people's lives, but not as something that is necessarily connected to marriage. Girls are expected to exercise control over these feelings and thoughts, not weakly "run after their dreams," as an old woman once put it.

Yet boys who are so consumed by *'ishq* that they start affairs or elope are more readily pardoned. Their responsibility is not an issue: Instead, girls and women fall under scrutiny for being weak enough to allow such behaviors to happen. During her fieldwork in a Muslim community in Kerala, South India, Caroline Osella (2012) witnessed a similar pattern, writing that "women neither confront nor blame men, and continue instead to blame other women for their role in provoking male suspicion and anger and hence for precipitating greater control on all women" (29). An eighteen-year-old girl I interviewed made that point about people's attitudes in Gilgit: "They say, as long as the girl is not corrupt (*kharāb*), the boy will not be spoilt. Only girls make boys bad." While the statement might seem to suggest that men are superior creatures, tainted by women, it also stresses women's power over them. Everyone may be

aware of men's weaknesses, but women, who are raised to embody self-discipline and emotional steadiness, are expected to be stronger. They control men through their equanimity, whereas men may seek to control women with active blame, or even violent threats.

One of my host families told me the story of a girl from their Shia neighborhood who ran away with her lover the night before the celebrations were supposed to start for her wedding to a different man. Because she was in love with a man from Diamer, which is to say, someone from a conservative Sunni orientation that Gilgit's Shias vilify, she did not see any other option but a radical escape. Some of the younger women embellished the story with key details about how every step of their elopement had been assiduously planned. An older lady suggested that she might as well have been killed by her *māmūṉ* (mother's brother) to prevent a public scandal. Others added that after some time, the girl called her parents to tell them that she was fine and was living with her husband and his family in Chilas, so there was no need to search for her.

While the vast majority of weddings in Pakistan are Islamic contracts based on family consent, it is possible for eloping couples to get married in court. Several law firms in big cities specialize in this legal procedure; state law ideally treats people as equal citizens whose different backgrounds do not matter, and a woman of legal age needs not be accompanied by a male representative from her family; but officials with patriarchal or Islamic opinions frequently find ways to discriminate despite these rights. During my fieldwork in Gilgit, however, I have come across only one couple who had a court marriage, and it took place in Lahore, not in a Gilgiti courtroom. In the city's suburbs, I also met a liberal *sheikh* who sporadically weds eloping lovers, even without their families' approval. The religious scholar argues that Islamic teaching does not negate love as long as the couple has not touched each other: According to Shiite jurisdiction, the consent of both sound adults is enough for a valid *nikāḥ* (Patel 2003, 4).

Dishonoring one's parents, though, strikes most residents as an endeavor with few prospects, and visibly defying parental advice by eloping means the harshest mortification for one's family. Parents are not only publicly exposed and shamed but also deeply hurt by their children's disregard for their feelings and social standing, which is itself a sign of their own failure to pass on moral values. Besides worrying about and certainly also missing their daughter, the family of an eloped girl faces harsh social consequences; it is "punishment for the heart, as well as for their reputation," as one middle-aged mother told me. The family will be avoided by others, their voices no longer appreciated in discussions, and they will actively withdraw from public activities because they do not dare—literally—to "face" anyone who would reflect their degradation. Younger sisters will have difficulties receiving appropriate marriage proposals and most likely will only be able to marry within the close circle of relatives who are equally

afflicted by the loss of reputation and who therefore support each other in such times. Moreover, the connection to the daughter is completely cut: She is disowned as a family member. Even Husun Bano was imprisoned by her parents when she came home after independently coupling with Behram. Such drastic measures work to deter women from acting on their own wishes, but they are also fueled by emotions of revenge. Men like Ifra's father feel dishonored both by the girls who spurn their care and undermine their authority and by other men who obviously do not respect their authority enough to stay within their boundaries. Even if a relationship stays rather platonic, and does not lead to elopement, social exclusion and violence pose real and existential threats to lovers, whose relatives may resort to honor crimes to counter self-perceptions of social ridicule and prove their masculinity and power.

To escape such dangers, lovers might elope to a big, more anonymous city, which entails breaking off all natal ties. Success necessitates staying together and, out of fear of persecution, never returning home. The anthropologist Perveez Mody (2008) observes the outcome of such an escape: "In most elopement cases, the couple, despite making their relationships visible, paradoxically become themselves invisible: they are on the run and hiding from literally everybody" (2006, 336). Like Husun Bano and Behram, the lovers embark on a journey that lies largely outside of their own control. Behram must conquer a series of magical obstacles before arriving at Husun Bano's parents' home and earning their approval; in real life, families confront years of pain and grief. Some manage to resume relationships when the first grandchildren are born, but usually without the full support family relations ought to provide. Many young women from Shalini Grover's sample of Delhi's poor (2011) therefore describe love marriages as especially stable: Because the wife will not receive sympathy from others, she is both especially vulnerable and only answerable to herself; this means she must fully adjust to difficulties in her marriage.

In an extensive study of elopements, also in Delhi, Mody (2008) shows how families try to cover up their daughters' shameful behavior by filing a kidnapping or abduction case with the police. If she is recovered, whether by the police or relatives, her parents will be able to reintegrate her into the family. One of Mody's subjects even pretended to have been abducted on her own, without her parents' encouragement, instead of admitting she had eloped. By covering up her own actions, she hoped to save her family's honor. In Gilgit, most of the stories of elopements that I could verify were only attempts and involved daughters who had returned to their families. As soon as a girl's family finds out she has left the house to be with a man, they will do everything they can to retrieve her, and often successfully stop her before the marriage takes place. When the girl is found in time, her future can take various forms. Her family might bring her home and scare off the seducer. They may pressure the boy to marry her in a proper, honorable way—that is, if they are from the same

community. And in very rare scenarios, the men of her family might kill her, or both her and her lover. More often, the social acceptance of honor killings means they function largely as threats that help families bend boys to their will. As one young man summed up the situation: "If you don't marry, then you'll catch a bullet (*Agr shādī nahīn karnā hai, bas, golī khānā hai*)." A patched-up marriage, however, just serves to limit the damage. Everyone would suspect an indecent reason behind a hasty and unequal wedding between seeming strangers, and their families' social standings would still be harmed.

I heard so many references to elopements that I began questioning the reliability of my interlocutors' stories. In response, some of my friends took me to visit the neighbors of one of their cousins, whose oldest daughter, now in her mid-twenties, had run away with her boyfriend some years ago. She was brought back home after a couple of days. The young woman was still unmarried and she declared she had no interest in men; she was instead focusing on her studies to become a doctor. Two of her younger sisters had already married close relatives. One of them was visiting with her little baby and vigilantly paid attention to our conversation. Because I did not dare to ask about the elopement in front of everyone, I scheduled a more detailed interview for the next day; I hoped we would be alone and could talk about more private matters without her sister eying us. Unfortunately, their mother, obviously scared that the story would spread still further, prevented us from meeting. Her neighbors told us afterward that the whole community knows about the family drama. However, the girl's father, they said, is in such denial that he ignores any reference to his daughter's shameless act, which may be a good strategy to protect himself from feeling dishonored and socially stigmatized. Thanks to his support, the young woman will continue her studies in Karachi and might even find a husband there who does not know anything about her past transgression.

'Arifa's case seemed similar. She was still unmarried in her late twenties, and behind her back, I heard distant relatives pity her for not having received any offers. Since she was a close cousin of one of my host families, I spent a great deal of time with her, and could not help wondering why her immediate family was not putting any effort into finding a match for her. While all other members of her household had personal mobiles phones, 'Arifa did not. She also told me her father had gotten rid of their TV a few years ago. And she repeatedly condemned mobile phones and television dramas as negative influences on girls, and especially dangerous for the teenagers who might misuse them. Because this submissive attitude did not fit 'Arifa's otherwise loud and cheerful personality, I suspected the real reason for these measures was being kept from me: she must have had an inappropriate relationship via phone herself. At home, she was excessively obedient to her parents and especially modest in front of male kin. In public, however, she walked freely in the neighborhood and frequently

visited relatives alone, as though she was exploiting the fact that she did not have a public reputation to lose.

The only "successful" elopement I heard about first-hand was that of Amna, a Punjabi woman who had run away with a man from Ghizer district about three years previously. Now she lives with his family in the vicinity of Gilgit. They had started talking to each other on their mobiles just through chance: One of her friends had accidentally mistyped a number on her phone and called him; he called her back and their love story began. After an intense six months involving long hours of secret phone conversations, her family started planning her engagement to a cousin. To prevent this, her lover came to Lahore to meet her, and they fled to Gilgit together. Amna remembers how scared she was in the beginning because she did not know what she had got herself into, or what her husband's family would be like, but she quickly adapted to the new environment. Yet she remains very sad about the loss of her relationship with her own kin: They still do not "comply" (*rāẓī*) with her decision. She is in touch with some women from the family over the phone, and her mother had recently come to visit, but the men acted as if she was no longer alive. Reflecting on her experience, Amna told me: "Well, in the end I have to spend my life with my husband, not with my parents. I'm happy with him and my little daughter."

My local friends were fascinated by her because they felt so immensely ambivalent about her attitude. The girls repeatedly discussed Amna's misery at being cut off from her family, yet they also compared her courage to that of characters in movie love plots. Given the choice to do things over, Amna seemed undecided about whether she would take the same path, and she stressed that mobile phones have a negative influence on unmarried young girls. She framed the phone as a *shaiṭān* (devil) who remotely controlled her, which I saw as an attempt to make sense of events, even her own actions and decisions, with reference to the spiritual world. Although she had proved her love for her husband with her decision to go with him, he increasingly doubted her. After all, a woman who throws away her reputation and all social ties when subsumed by strong feelings like *'ishq* can never be trusted. She might do something similar again.

Mobile Suspicions

While many older people in and around Gilgit point out that feelings of passionate love have always existed, most locals agree that mobile phones are responsible for an increased realization of love relationships. For while love affairs can develop among relatives or neighbors without phones, the relative affordability of networked, personal devices now makes it possible for geographically or socially distant couples to get to know each other or even to coordinate

TABLE 4

Khowar Song about the Influence of Mobile Phones

Urdū transliteration:	English translation:
Mobile! *Āpkī vaja se merī 'izzat calī ga'ī*	Mobile, because of you my reputation has gone
Mere vaṭan kī ġhairat bhī calī ga'ī	My homeland's honor has also gone
Sharīfon kī sharāfat bhī calī ga'ī	The decency of the decent has also gone
Sab gharon se barkat bhī calī ga'ī	The blessing has left all houses
SMS kar ke shām ko beṭī ghā'ib ho ga'ī	After writing SMS at night, the daughter has disappeared
Beṭī ko ḍhūnḍ kar rāt kī tārīkī men bāp ko taklīf hū'ī	Searching for the daughter in the darkness of the night, brought troubles to the father
Islāmī laṛkī kī sharm-o-hayā aur acchī 'adat calī ga'ī	The Muslim girl's decent *sharm* and her good behavior has gone

Data source: Video uploaded to YouTube by Kamal Din in 2014 (now removed). Khowar translated into Urdu by Sultan Ahmed.

secret meetings. A Khowar song (table 4) from the western part of Gilgit-Baltistan's mountain range depicts a daughter's elopement as a loss of modest reserve, respectability, and honor—all supposedly caused by mobile phones.

To develop a mobile phone romance with a stranger, boys need to get a girl's phone number or dial random numbers in the hope of connecting with a girl on the other end;[9] neither strategy, however, has much prospect of success. Raised to be in control of their feelings, and understanding that emotions are not entirely inward, but are constituted through relationships, the majority of girls "instinctively" protect themselves from temptation, for example by not answering calls from unknown numbers. Nevertheless, many young men try again and again to hook up with girls they barely know. Never has this been easier to do undetected or with fewer potential repercussions than through the invisible pathways of mobile phones. While a man would never enter the house of a family with which he is not acquainted, mobiles transcend the safety of the household and boys do not seem to mind intruding on women's private space on the phone. They exploit the anonymity and immateriality of the mobile phone connection, and women have to defend themselves. Given the generally reserved demeanor of girls and the famous Bollywood role model of mocking men by playing hard to get, young men might think that persistence pays off and continue calling and

sending messages for days without a reply. Most of my female interlocutors perceived incessant "missed calls" as very irritating (*tang karte*); after all, these are strangers imposing themselves on them. As some boys only talk "dirty" when a girl answers, the girls simply assume that is a way for young men to alleviate the boredom of their abundant leisure time. If the tedious suitor does not get tired, girls often resort to the help of a brother, cousin, or young uncle to answer one of the calls and the problem is solved. By involving a family member, the girl shifts over responsibility and demonstrates her noble character, while also exposing the perpetrator. As one girl explained to me: "Once you answer an unknown number, the problem starts, that's why I don't even pick up. Earlier I showed an incoming call to my *māmūṉ* [mother's brother] and he talked to the caller telling him that he is wrong here. Even if it was not a mistake, at least afterwards he did not call anymore."

The widespread existence of such tease calls also raises the issue of more serious cases of harassment and bullying through mobile phones, such as blackmailing others with information or a picture of an indecent meeting (Hassan and Unwin 2017). Moreover, such obvious transgressions, combined with the awareness that mobile affairs elude public observation, fuel suspicions that mobile phones enable illicit relationships among youths. Many mobile phone researchers (Jorgenson 2014; Pertierra 2005; Kriem 2009) also claim that it is easier for young women to get into relationships with strangers on the phone as they live far away and will never see each other. Their interactions are detached from any real-life obligations and constraints that might enable "new and radical identities" (Pertierra 2005, 27). One of my older interlocutors in Gilgit applied the same line of reasoning and argued that through mobile phone connections, young women would get so used to the other person that they would loosen their embodied modesty: "In former times girls were extremely *shermātī*. Since the mobile, *sharm* has disappeared. When they talk on the phone a lot, what should be the big difference to direct interaction (*āmne sāmne*). It's become very easy." My friend Seema, however, pointed out that technology may simply be raising peoples' awareness about attitudes that already existed:

> Before the mobile, girls also did dirty things, people just didn't notice back then without media attention and so on. In the old days, when there were no mobiles, they also did this work (*kām*, referring to sex)—secretly. They didn't use SMS so it didn't become so public (*mashūr*). Today, if I or you met someone, we would message with him to coordinate and everyone would get to know. To me it doesn't seem as if mobile phones have spoilt everyone. But because of mobiles these things have become a little better known.

In line with mobile phones, many Gilgitis identify increased girls' education, physical mobility, media portrayals of foreign places, and the desire to explore

as conduits for young women's newfound desires and affairs. Some girls become so curious about new ways of living that they dare to put the pursuit of love above other interests. Lacking the confidence to trust in family support, for example, by talking openly about their feelings with their mother or another relative, they hand over their lives to a relative stranger. According to gossip in Gilgit, many boys do not take premarital relationships seriously and just see them as "*time pass,*" a short-term affair culminating in physical intimacy, or at least in attempts by boys to secure it. Leena Abraham (2002) observed that "time pass" is one of three categories with which low-income college students in Mumbai categorized mixed-gender relationships. The other two are "true love," which describes a respectful and sincere commitment with the goal to marry, and "bhai-behen [*sic*] (brother-sister)," in which, to diffuse suspicion when spending time together on campus or studying together, a girl addresses a boy as "brother," thus turning him into kin.

Because young men are under pressure to gather sexual experience as proof of masculinity, they often brag about their conquests, real or not, to their peers. This may be why Knudsen (2009) states that, in the Palas Valley in Kohistan, just south of Gilgit-Baltistan's Diamer district, extramarital affairs are very common. Given that his reports are all based on men's verbal accounts about their own conquests or gossip about others', and that he even describes them as men bragging among their peers about affairs as "proof of virility and courage" (100), we might take this conclusion with some skepticism. My fieldwork leads me to believe that actual incidents are fairly exaggerated, and that these men's accounts may say less about objective truth than their attitude toward the subject. The countless rumors about mobile phone romances I heard in Gilgit seemed similar: While they might contain a modicum of truth, they seemed to say more about people's concern and interest than they do about reality. People are fascinated by the new possibilities of the digital realm. Some young men, for example, create multiple Facebook profiles to display different parts of their identities to different people (cf. Schoemaker 2016).

My friend Salman told me about one of his own technological pranks. One day, he received an SMS from an unknown number asking him if he was a girl. He decided to play along and told the stranger on the other end, yes. His name, he said, was Fatima. After messaging back and forth for some time, he started receiving *ghazals* (love poems). Knowing that girls do not reply as often or as quickly as boys, Salman kept the other man waiting, which must have given him the impression that his beloved did not have enough *balance.* In response, the stranger would occasionally send Salman one hundred rupees (approximately seventy-four Eurocents at the exchange rate of mid-2014). Salman instructed him not to call so as not to attract the attention of the family, so they only communicated through SMS. "Once I called him and let him listen to a song from the computer. He was so happy," Salman added with a smirk. At some point he told his suitor that he was making bread for a guest who was coming to see the family

for a marriage proposal. Since "this made him completely crazy," Salman suggested they should run away together. When, one day, the lovesick man called from an unknown number and Salman carelessly answered, the man must have realized that his beloved was actually a boy. He never contacted Salman again. While the example suggests we ought not to believe all stories about premarital romances, it also shows us a scheme that some girls might resort to in order to boost their pocket money, regardless of how seriously they take a flirtatious relationship.

Rumors have also flown about the goings-on at the local Karakoram International University (KIU), especially in the first years after its extensive campus just outside the city opened in 2002. Together with its newer branches in Skardu and lately Hunza, KIU-Gilgit provides the only opportunity for proper university-level education in Gilgit-Baltistan. As is the case for academic institutions throughout Pakistan, KIU is coeducational, meaning that men and women can interact behind the high walls surrounding the university grounds. Alarmed at its perceived liberality and promiscuity, some people reported that obscene pornographic material had been circulated on campus, that girls have eloped with boys from other denominations whom they met at school, and even that couples have been encountered in the midst of sexual acts on university property. While it might be true that some girls take off their '*abāya* (black cloak) or let their veil slip in the protected environment on campus, actual socializing between genders occurs less frequently than public perception would suggest. Girls and boys mostly stay in separate groups and only interact with the other gender within their circle of relatives or for coursework. Apart from close-knit social networks that function as a form of mutual monitoring, security guards and a self-proclaimed moral police of students patrol the highly frequented public areas on campus, such as the open-air cafeteria. Rumors with sexual content therefore seem greatly exaggerated and mirror attempts to discredit women's empowerment (cf. Loureiro 2019). As many families prefer to keep their daughters close to home, rather than sending them to faraway universities on their own, more than half of enrolled students at KIU are girls (Kriebel 2014). Many of them told me that they appreciate the unconventional environment and atmosphere of learning the university provides and defend it against unsubstantiated prejudices.

While social boundaries seem more porous for boys, girls hardly mix with fellow students from other sects or language groups. Despite many students' efforts to present themselves as liberal and tolerant, one group finds itself especially stigmatized and affected by rumors: girls of the Ismaili community. Because the current Aga Khan's grandfather promoted women's socio-economic empowerment and condemned seclusion and "exaggerated" veiling as misogynistic "slavery" (Khoja-Moolji 2011, 7), they follow more relaxed *parda* rules that do not require strict covering of the head nor prevent verbal interaction with boys. Aga Khan III advocated religion's "inner meanings" (Steinberg 2011, 49) over outer

appearances, but when thrown against the background of expected feminine modesty among the Sunni and Shia populations of Gilgit, Ismaili girls' conduct is prone to misinterpretations. As one Ismaili student told an anthropology student I was working with: "The boys from our sect are used to girls. But the boys from the other sects, especially the *Kashroti* boys,[10] are too close-minded. They think when you talk to them you are their girlfriend" (Kriebel 2014, 148). To Sunni and Shia boys accustomed to the restrictive environment of Gilgit city, girls who laugh in public, informally chat with boys, wear jeans, and have their hair loose seem to be signaling their availability and lax morals. Young Ismaili women who are the targets of men's blatant staring voice frustration with what they see as the public's bigotry and hypocrisy: "The *'abāya* alone doesn't fix everything. One should have a clean (*sāf*) heart. Their [Shia and Sunni] women are also not 'washed in milk (*dūdh ke dulhe*)' [meaning pure—just like the fairies bathing in pools of milk in their kingdom]." The girl here insinuated that flirting can well exist when wearing a *niqāb* (face veil), and that Ismaili Muslims are just as moral as their neighbors, if not more so. Other women who interact more freely with men, for example out of economic necessity to work outside of the house, similarly characterize their inner stance as "*parda* of the heart" (Kirmani 2009, 55) to preserve their virtuous character.

While Ismaili girls are allowed to talk with boys, they are so conscious of being scrutinized in Gilgit that they seem especially keen to portray an exemplary image of themselves. After all, in everyday conversations and interviews, the decay of morals is often indicated with the phrase *bāten karnā* (to talk) or its Shina equivalent, *morek tho'ik*. Talking stands metaphorically for the shrinking distance between women and men, wives and husbands. Mobile phones facilitate talking, an intimacy that challenges the established value system of gender segregation and is seen as potentially leading to elopements. Yet Ismaili Muslims, just like the Sunni and Shia, are forbidden from engaging in physical intimacy outside of marriage, and most Ismaili families do not allow private meetings of couples before their wedding. Although the following statement by a young Shia man about his Ismaili class fellows hints at the existence of premarital relationships, it also demonstrates how innocent such illicit encounters are: "There are *settings*, I 'sat' with one [a girl]." Many Ismaili students do not consider "sitting together" a challenge of religious values as long as the interaction remains platonic. Outside of the university context, however, the term "*setting*" implies a more dubious, secret meeting of lovers—although, given Gilgit's close-knit society, such rendezvous are rarely possible.

When young women from Gilgit leave their families and their mountain community to pursue further education in Pakistan's big cities, they are exposed to a different social environment. In the Punjab, love affairs are perceived to be commonplace. Regardless of the truth or exaggeration of this impression, people

associate metropolitan anonymity, coupled with the invisible interconnectedness of mobile phones, with wild relationships and loose morals. An eighteen-year-old boy from a valley near Gilgit shared this assessment, though he had never lived in the Punjab: "Here [in Gilgit] we don't meet, here there are so many people that know us (*jān-pehjān vāle*). If they see you, you will get stuck (*phas*). But there [in Islamabad] is a trend that hasn't reached Gilgit, yet, only a little bit because the Hunza people [Ismaili community] are very *advanced*, they make girlfriends and boyfriends. There everything is open, people don't worry about their family's honor (*'izzat*), even the girls in college have their own phones and can meet boys."

Many local families from all sects send their daughters to college in Rawalpindi, Lahore, or Karachi, where they stay with extended family or lodge in hostels. But the one or two stories I was able to confirm about girls who went on dates with strangers were greatly inflated and pointed to, again and again, as evidence of a larger trend. A daring woman is said to have had three or four "boyfriends" simultaneously: one only on the phone, another one to send *balance*, a third to take her out to have some fun, and the fourth a cousin with serious marital prospects for the future. The more I heard, the more I had the impression that such scandalous stories circulate as a form of deterrence. Since most families from Gilgit-Baltistan already have networks in the cities, their offspring do not usually live completely detached from any social forces (Benz 2014). I have, however, observed changes in several girls over the course of their stay in the Punjab. Many of them became more self-assured, confident in their Urdu, and agitated in their manner with friends or when out for shopping in the markets of Islamabad or Rawalpindi.

The years in a hostel coincide with an important formative period around the age of twenty: They are not only exposed to a different cultural environment and the pluralism of the big city, but also influenced by the knowledge they acquire in their studies and from living independently. Young women greatly value these years of education, less for the actual schooling and more for the relative freedom and diversion compared to their home environment in Gilgit. They return prepared to reshape, with varying degrees of subtlety, the norms of interaction between women and men, gender equality, and love itself. Men of all ages repeatedly expressed to me their appreciation of the fact that women are taking more active roles in their lives. While this might partly be due to people's assumption that a foreign academic values girls' education, a strong education narrative exists in the area. A privately organized girls' school in the adjacent, yet relatively remote Bagrot Valley, the prestigious Army Military School, and the Aga Khan Higher Secondary School in Gilgit are all cited as successes. Quite frequently, young men told me they enjoyed the companionship of educated girls and were looking for equal partners for their marriage. Since they

would not want their future wife to have a history of boyfriends, or be too experienced, this could be a double-edged sword.

To better understand the myth of promiscuity among students, I had to learn more about the way my Gilgiti interlocutors used the term "boyfriend." While there are small, liberal circles at Pakistani universities who read leftist literature, drink alcohol, and are involved in sexual relationships, I have never seen any evidence for such behavior among young girls from the economically relatively modest backgrounds of Gilgit. When some of them do have what they conceive of as a boyfriend, they do not see it as a steady or even monogamous relationship that might lead to marriage. It is rather an entertainment, a platonic "*time pass*" to tease out the workings of gender. In fact, a young woman from an inner-city *moḥalla* (neighborhood) of Gilgit was surprised when I told her that most boyfriend-girlfriend relationships in Germany are monogamous. While she would certainly never question the fact that a wife cannot take a second man when she was married, she exclaimed: "Why should one not be able to make another *boyfriend* when you already have one?" A boyfriend in the perception of the younger generation in the area of Gilgit is a boy whom a girl might or might not know from real-life encounters but is certainly in contact with over mobile phone. Although such relationships can get emotionally intense and lead to loving attachments, even elopements, most of these interactions stay on a very superficial level, and there is prestige in collecting phone numbers and admirers. For girls this is an expression of self-determination and does not threaten to blot their reputation. Paul Rollier (2010) made the same observation for Lahore: Although there are quite a few romantic phone relationships among young adults, they almost always stay virtual, and face-to-face meetings are rare. Such wrong-number, or time-pass relationships rather serve as space outside of one's real life to explore new possibilities and alternative futures (cf. Qermezi Huang 2017). In fact, in another piece I argue that the existence of constant connectivity through cell phones and social media that render different contexts present at the same time can even have the contrary effect and force young women to deliberately limit various roles of themselves to create a congruous self-narrative (Walter forthcoming).

And, of course, (pre-)marital romances do not always work out. Arif, for example, had suffered through a terrible heartbreak a few years back. For about one year he was in constant touch with a distant relative, a headstrong young girl, who lived with her aunt's family, close to Arif's, in the suburbs of Gilgit. She did not possess her own mobile but was allowed to use the one belonging to her older brother, who had also come to the urban center for education and who was Arif's best friend. After some time Arif was able to convince his parents to pose an inquiry of marriage for the girl, but they learned that her family was already in negotiations with another boy's parents and was not willing to offend these relations. From this moment on, the two lovers worked to accept reality.

By suspending contact immediately, they disciplined themselves to cool down their hopes and wishes. It was hard for them in the beginning, but after one or two years of emotional hardship, they succeeded in overcoming both their *'ishq* and their grief. "I changed my *system*," Arif told me, describing this phase of consciously working on his emotions. In his case, as in so many others, social boundaries proved stronger than individual desires, and he had the personal and the cultural repertoire to comply with them.

Efforts to Recapture Agency

While some young people, failing to communicate or integrate their personal desires into received familial and cultural frameworks, succumb to lovesickness, elope, and face social ostracization or the violence of an honor crime, Gilgiti women do have ways to regain a grip on a situation. The bleakest is suicide, and women in the area of Gilgit regularly referred to cases as, "She went into the river." The cold, roaring mountain streams assure a relatively quick and certain death, but taking poison is a common alternative. Women's suicides are mostly understood as reactions to marital discord or to feeling overburdened with household and childcare duties. While I cannot quantify numbers for Gilgit, the high rate of female suicide in Gilgit's adjacent Ghizer district has raised considerable attention: A study led by psychiatrist Murad Khan showed that in a population of a little more than 120,000, forty-nine women committed suicide between 2000 and 2004; the majority of them were married and between the ages of sixteen and thirty-five (Khan, Ahmed, and Kahn 2009). In recent years, journalists reported that numbers are said to have soared into the hundreds (Ahmed 2016). Public opinion blames the disconnect between Ghizer's highly educated Ismaili women and their husbands' considerably lower interest in schooling; while many of these young wives have been exposed to life in the metropolis during their studies, it might be hard to adapt to physical work in the village as well as a more restrictive social environment (cf. Billaud 2012). Apparent suicides in the river might also be cover-ups for honor crimes, which occur in reaction to struggles over a woman's self-determination. However high the exact number of drowned women is, it is a clear indicator of intense social unrest that merits further investigation.

The story of Ifra, the Ismaili girl who took rat poison after falling in love with a Sunni boy, is a good example of how such emotionally intense negotiations play out within families. She had grown up learning to accommodate her feelings according to *parda* guidelines, but she also attuned them with discourses prevalent in her social environment and in TV dramas, such as concepts of passionate love and growing individualism, and overcame her embodied self-discipline under the sway of love. When she was first recovering from her suicide attempt, she did not talk to anyone and stubbornly plotted an

alternative escape. She was angry with her family, but she also felt sorry for her father, who suffered from the loss of reputation and was evidently worried about Ifra. Little by little, she reconciled with her sisters, who cared for her lovingly; they talked for hours without once mentioning Ifra's boyfriend. This slowly diminished his influence, and over time Ifra collected herself and regained her composure. She now perceives herself to be stronger, having overcome her own rebellious period.

Suicides and attempted suicides suggest a drastic desire to be heard. For a similar social setting in Afghanistan, where women pride themselves on their ability to endure, Julie Billaud (2015) frames them as women's way to register protest and to "gain public validation" (185) for it. Instead of seriously wanting to end their lives, she perceives her interlocutors' acts of taking poison or self-immolation as "rebellious dimension of female social performances" (Billaud 2012, 274). As one of her interlocutors stated: "I don't see such women as victims. To me, victims are those who accept to suffer. But if they try to show to their inside and outside worlds that they don't accept repression, they are not victims anymore" (265). Rather than being the outcome of emotional weakness, such open expressions of discontent consciously challenge existing social dynamics and serve to exert pressure on men to not risk their reputation by overly confining their women family members.

When men behave in similar ways, however, their acts are simply framed and explained with *'ishq*. Ifra's beloved, for example, cultivated his sorrow about an impossible love in accordance with the stereotypical South Asian hero who longs for and is overpowered by his passion. And men attempt suicide too, albeit in smaller numbers. A teenage boy from Gilgit's suburban area of Danyore, still too young to become a husband, shot himself with a handgun because the girl he adored was about to marry someone else. He left a farewell letter for his parents explaining his motive. Sharing their sorrow and the regret that they could not help him, his family passed the letter around in the days of the funeral prayers; since he was a boy, there was no need for them to be embarrassed by his act. Some neighbors even interpreted his extreme form of desperation for a girl as induced by love magic.

As suicide can turn victims into actors, magic promises another way to end suffering and influence one's destiny. One day one of my primary interlocutors in Gilgit went to see a dubious *maulvī* with her husband's sister. The Islamic scholar was known for his expertise in both white and dark magic. Although she did not agree to take me along, she told me about her trip in detail afterward. As she explained, her sisters-in-law—and, she insisted with anxious laughter, *only* her sisters and *not* herself—regularly purchased his magical trinkets and had him make amulets (*ta'vīz*) to secure their husbands' affection and faithfulness. While the women were waiting to see the *maulvī*, they overheard a conversation in the next room between two young men who were picking up talismans they

had ordered to bewitch girls to elope with them. One can allegedly spend from 1,000 to 20,000 rupees (7.40 to 148 euros at the exchange rate of mid-2014) on such a magical object, depending on how powerful it is. To activate the spell, the *maulvī* blows *dam* (exhaled breath charged with divine powers, which is also used for healing) on a small paper with Qur'anic quotes wrapped around a substance from the admired girl's body, like a lost hair, or close to it, a fallen-off piece of her clothes. When the young man sticks the talisman into the ground near his beloved's house and stirs the sand around it, the girl's heart will be stirred in the same way. Another, even more powerful type of love magic works through consumption: One must give one's beloved magically charged water to drink or food to eat with the help of a mutual friend or throw the *ta'vīz* into the family's water tank. "All by themselves our girls would not run away," one of my middle-aged friends declared, suggesting that only a higher power can lead one to act on passionate feelings.

Magic works in different directions. Men are often said to be the target, especially when larger family conflicts arise. The contention I repeatedly heard was that evil spells had been cast upon a whole family to bring distress and misfortune. Continuous quarrels between family members, mysterious illnesses, a woman's infertility, or a man's professional drawbacks can all prompt suspicions of black magic (*kālā jādū*), usually fueled by social envy or revenge for a long-lost love. A shaman (*dayyal* in Shina, *bīṭān* in Burushaski) might be called to the house to discover underlying structures of malicious relations. In a trance from inhaling juniper smoke, she or he would point to a certain spot in the building or the courtyard. After an intensive search that might involve digging up the ground under the front stairs or thrusting a hole in the ceiling, a *ta'vīz* appears. Even my field assistant, an anthropologist trained in Islamabad who declared he did not believe in superstition, was amazed when he witnessed such evidence being dug up. To obliterate the talisman's powers, one must destroy it. Sometimes, this means burning it, but at other times, just unwrapping the paper or becoming aware of its existence breaks the spell.

The vast majority of amulets existing in Gilgit-Baltistan are used not to interrupt or destroy the lives of others, but to work against physical pains and chronic illnesses, such as migraines, depression, or bad dreams. They ward off the evil eye (*naẓr*) and spread positive energy to protect people from harm through *jins* (ghosts) and other spirits. Magical objects come in various forms. In addition to being buried, they may remain guarded at home, or wrapped in cloth and worn around the neck, the arm, or wrist. The bearers themselves, or one of their family members, commission them from a *maulvī*, *sheikh,* or *sayyid* who possesses Islamic knowledge for such defensive remedies. Since amulets, both in their protective and their destructive form, are flexibly associated with religious authorities, as well as shamans, their powers derive from the Qur'an, evil spirits, or fairies.

Seeking assistance to exert influence on one's life, many locals in the area of Gilgit consult shamans to ward off curses and serve as oracles. Chosen by the fairies as mediums, they are masters in transcending the borders to parallel worlds and can access wisdom from the fairy kingdom.[11] When people turn to shamans for relatively mundane tasks, such as imbuing amulets with their breath, or appeasing various spirits to ensure success in love, business, or polo games, a shaman connects to her or his patron fairies in her or his own way (Csáji 2011; Marhoffer-Wolff 2002; Sidky 1994). One of the shamans I consulted, for example, sunk her gaze into a glass of water to shift between the worlds. Another observed the movement of small nails on a board and one prayed along a *tasbī'* (string of Islamic prayer beads) to hear the fairies' voices. The syncretic character of the last medium bewildered me at first but demonstrates the compatibility of spiritual beliefs and Islam. As the Qur'an refers to supernatural beings, such as angels and *jins*, the expansion of Islam has not eradicated local belief in fairies. On the contrary, I have overheard more than once a person expressing doubts about the existence of such spirits being reprimanded and told that they must exist because they are mentioned in the scriptures (cf. Khan 2006).

In the course of my fieldwork, I noticed that it is mainly women who resort to shamans, and the majority of contemporary shamans I met and heard about are also women. When asked, many men and educated youths dismissed shamanistic practices as superstitious and "backward" or "un-Islamic." The idea of women dancing to drums and flutes in ecstasy, or healing medical problems with supernatural practices does not fit into a rational, "modern" way of understanding the world through Islamic teachings or scientific education. Yet for many women, independent of their age, shamanism provides some space to leave their daily social reality behind and find ways to influence what is happening in their families', or in their enemies', lives. Female shamans, for their part, acquire prestige, income, and the dignity of expert knowledge, which together gives them a confidence they can pass on to their clients. The power of sorcery therefore caters to a subversive element in the social order. Having been afflicted with black magic in Gilgit herself and been taken to see religious healers and a shaman for relief, the anthropologist Emma Varley (2012a) identifies the sorcery complex as "women's opportunity to express dissatisfaction with their life's circumstances, comment on social discord, or enact agency. By relation, the ill effects ascribed to sorcery offered women powerfully evocative, yet also indirect means by which to address the real-worlds harms they experienced in the course of married and family life. Divination also enabled women to account for and mediate misfortune, trauma and injustice" (19).

Magic in its diverse forms provides a way to disclose unresolved interpersonal conflicts and unburden oneself of domestic issues that often involve problems among relatives. In one of my host families, for example, a wedding arrangement went terribly wrong: The overzealous grandmother promised the

oldest daughter's hand to a stranger's family on a visit to her natal home village. Not only were her son, his wife, and their daughter angry and distressed, but so were other relatives who had been patiently waiting for the girl to finish her studies before sending their marriage proposals. Feeling deeply offended, these relatives avoided the house for months and did not speak to any of the family members. Around the same time, the grandmother fell seriously sick with a mysterious paralysis that no doctor could identify or cure. It was repeatedly suggested that, if not caused outright by black magic as revenge for hurt feelings, it must have been related to the negative feelings within the extended family. Since the grandmother was mentally withdrawn and passed away after a few months, we can only assume that she might have collapsed under the emotional burden once she realized the dire consequences her overhasty, self-seeking decision had had for her family. Dutifully, her granddaughter followed through with the wedding a year later and her mother worked hard to appease the offended relatives with gifts and invitations, as well as through prayers, ritual sacrifices, and magic charms.

Besides amulets and the intervention of a divinity specialist, a wide array of practices exist to respond to uncertainties and insecurities: the sacrifice of an animal and distribution of its meat as Islamic charity (*ṣadiqa*); the invitation of neighbors for a lavish dinner (Shina: *kẖūdī*) to activate a sense of communal responsibility and eradicate animosities or jealousy; prayer meetings; pilgrimages to local saints' tombs; or massages with holy water (*zamzam*). The borders between the various kinds of divinities are fluid and coalescing and calling upon them can be a way to take the lead in one's life, or rather to seek supernatural support for the difficult task of mastering one's emotions. While passion and desire can lead people to behave in dramatic ways, acting on *'ishq* to have an affair, elope, or attempt suicide, most women in the area of Gilgit possess the cultivated abilities to trust their embodied *sharm* and avoid such rash behaviors.

Resisting the attraction of the passionate, but potentially highly destructive *'ishq* does not condemn one to a marriage devoid of love. Even though attraction might not be a factor in the matchmaking, both partner's efforts to adjust can pave the way for mutual appreciation and affection to grow. New developments follow a similar path, adding an element of passion to their conjugal lives to own the collective choice of partner and make the relationship their own. More than just mimicking transnational trends, the contemporary increase of romance draws on already known registers of love, thereby merging elements of slowly growing appreciation and ideas of great *'ishq* into a socially more feasible love affair. The next chapter will sketch a shift of acceptable conjugal relations that manifests in the active implementation and negotiation of intimacy between young couples.

5

Romancing Marriage

"Love or arranged?" girlfriends often ask each other upon hearing news about an upcoming wedding. Gilgit's youth use the English words for both forms of marriage, but neither term means what it does in a Euro-American context. A "love marriage" is not the product of a self-directed romance, but of a couple who, having been matched by their families, develop a sense of romance between themselves. "Arranged marriage" is not "forced" upon children without their involvement, but rather suggests that a couple whose parents have arranged their match may not yet know one another very well. These terms do not reflect a strict dichotomy. Rather, they indicate that marriage in Gilgit-Baltistan is changing. In the past, when marriages proceeded more or less uniformly, there was no need for new terminology: *shādī'* was simply what marriage was. Now, however, couples are entering into "love marriages" that seem distinct from earlier practices.

The majority of my interlocutors in the area of Gilgit hold fast to older conceptions of love, kinship relations, and women's emotional restraint. They see the pursuit of premarital romance as a selfish, individualistic, antisocial surrender to sexual urges. The types of "post-arranged" (Smith 2020, 90) or "love-cum-arranged" marriages (Mody 2008, 15) described for different regions of India, where some couples struggle to convert secret marriages of choice into respectable relationships within the family network are uncommon. In Gilgit and across South Asia, young people tend not to condone the impulsivity and adventure of elopements. Rather, they aspire to a mutual, egalitarian relationship between spouses that many authors describe as "companionate marriage." Spouses in companionate marriages value—as Simmons (1979), and later Hirsch and Wardlow (2009), have written—emotional closeness, sympathy, romance, and sexual fidelity between partners, and cultivate what Palriwala and Kaur (2014) define as "a personally satisfying conjugality" (16). In companionate marriages, the conjugal relationship takes precedence over same-sex

company or kin groups, a value that Gratz (2006) saw identified in the very architecture of Gilgit. In the 1990s, families began constructing extra rooms for newlyweds within the parental household, honoring their distinct relationship both within and apart from the extended family.

Companionate marriages can take a variety of forms, hybridizing arranged matches with expressions of individual consent, compatibility, and mutual approval by the couple themselves. Developing a companionate relationship thereby serves as proof of the partners' successful involvement. While the younger generations confidently adopt ideas of "individual choice, self-expression, and free will," they continue to value "caring, mutual involvement, and advice from parents and friends" (Robinson 2014, 256) and consciously take factors like socio-economic standing, education, or religion into consideration as they develop feelings for the partner their family has chosen in accordance with them. Mutual sympathy, romance, and sexual fidelity as expressions of attachment are therefore increasingly compatible with hybrid arrangements of family-guided decision-making. To emphasize the crossover of these strands, Henrike Donner (2016) employs the term "arranged love marriage," and writes that for her interlocutors in Kolkata the crucial marker of a love marriage is not premarital courtship, but the active involvement of both partners in the initiation of the match. In a newly published monograph on contemporary modes of matchmaking in middle-class Indian families, Parul Bhandari (2020) even pleads to completely move beyond the terms love and arranged marriage, or mixed versions thereof, to discard the misleading associations of love with "modernity" and arranged with "traditional," as both do not live up to the practical realities and many versions of conjugality. In other words, "love" does not replace "arranged." Rather, the whole concept of matrimony undergoes change and becomes an amalgamation of older and contemporary values.

My interlocutors made the same point about what they called "love marriages": Love tends to develop, they explained, when the match is already forthcoming. In this regard, practices in Gilgit resonate with patterns in other regions and social stratums in South Asia. As Twamley (2014) summarizes: "The engagement period is the main 'site' of romance [. . .] but the decision to marry is taken first" (104). Couples do not usually freely choose one another, and most of my interlocutors stress that romance had no part in the matchmaking process. Instead, more and more couples want to fall in love after both families have agreed to the match but before the formal wedding has taken place. For the Shia population, that interim phase takes place between the two-step wedding of *nikāḥ* and *shādī*. Sunni and Ismaili populations mostly do not hold *nikāḥ* separately from *shādī*, but they have a similar phase in which courtship can take place, between the formal engagement (*manganī*) and the wedding. In all three sects, this interim period used to be characterized by the couple's complete avoidance of each other, but nowadays it is being gradually transformed into a time



FIGURE 14 Newly wed couple on an outing.
Photo by the author.

of interaction and romance. Since engagements are social commitments that can be dissolved, the growing focus on conjugal companionship before the formal wedding strikes some people as a threat to chastity and obedience. Yet unmarried couples are usually not left without a chaperone, and sexual contact is forbidden. Nevertheless, all youth increasingly get to know their future spouses over the mobile phone and develop personal, intimate relationships that they perceive as self-directed. So young people's enthusiastic embrace of love finds a more or less respectable home within the liminal phase of courtship before the full implementation of their marriage.

The young people I got to know in Gilgit often labeled romantic feelings associated with such "modern"-style love marriages as *pyār,* a Hindi word that is popularly used in songs and Bollywood movies. Unlike the all-consuming love of *'ishq*, *pyār* does not overwhelm lovers or render them powerless. Yet as girls and boys in the Gilgit area repeatedly told me, *pyār* is more significant than a *time pass* or "normal affair/friendship" (*'am dostī*), which are only associated with sexual desire. In marriage, they said, *pyār* is a kind of "liking" (*pasand,* or Shina *khush*). Couples "like" each other and appreciate conjugal affection as a mutual feeling of connectedness that they consciously embrace and let happen. The vernacular terminology of *pasand kī shādī* (marriage of liking) distorts Euro-American associations of love and brings them into the Gilgiti context of "love marriages" as described by attachment and fondness, rather than passion. This is a sort of love that can be established after the *nikāḥ* or also develop after the *shādī*.

While young people might aspire to what Samuli Schielke (2015) calls "a grand scheme" (54) of romantic love, they rarely claim to fully realize it in their own lives. Similar to the situation in contemporary Egypt, love in the area of Gilgit serves as an ideal when nothing is at stake. The actual prospect of marriage forces young women and men to reflect on their own actions and responsibility in shaping their future in emotional, material, and familial terms. Many of my interlocutors kept numerous considerations in mind when deciding whether to assent to their families' choice of partner, albeit considerations their parents shared: They wanted to marry someone from the same sect, with a similar lifestyle, and with shared values. At the same time, they drew on the rhetoric of love in ways that reflected their awareness of global discourses of enlightenment, education, and empowerment. Love marriages allow them to enact imaginations of global progress locally. In a similar way, Pakistan's younger generations often use the English phrase "I love you," not only when expressing love for a partner but also for friends or family members. The phrase simultaneously demonstrates affection and asserts membership in a transnational "modernity."

Notions of romantic love, however, do not merely come to Gilgit-Baltistan from the outside. They also emerge from a long repertoire of emotional states associated with various forms of love and male-female relationships, from shameful modesty to passionate *'ishq*. But the time, place and meaning of such

love concepts within marriage is changing. With the increasing marriage age, growing level of education, and the ability to connect through new technologies, romantic love is becoming more commonplace now. A possibly never-consummated adoration for a distant beloved may be transformed into a life-long bond that justifies sexual involvement. Many of the young women I was closely acquainted with in Gilgit and surrounding areas recounted instantly falling in love with their future husband upon their first meetings, to the extent that they do not consider the relationship between spouses viable without a similar pre-existing attraction. It appears that, within the safe haven of a planned marital relationship, young women nowadays do not fear being discovered as being emotionally weak.

In an insightful account of court marriages in India, Rama Srinivasan (2020) stresses that a generational shift does not only depend on legislative frameworks or political struggles, but on growing levels of education that make women more self-determined and more desirous of equitable marriages. The striving for individual agency in Gilgit is similarly connected to the rise of girls' education and the growing average marriage age. Young women increasingly see themselves as having rights and values that should be honored by their own families and by their in-laws. Nevertheless, many teenagers and young adults in Gilgit told me they do not feel fit to undertake complex decisions alone, and that they benefit from consulting more experienced family members. Sharing the burden of whom to marry with their parents, or leaving it entirely up to them, alleviates individuals from responsibility for the success of their intimate lives. The increasing focus on the marital couple's happiness takes place within collective family dynamics. That includes important intermediaries and accomplices who may be enlisted to help romance develop. Older sisters may lend their mobiles so a couple can communicate; younger boys may be sent as messengers; a close cousin may pass on information about a possible spouse. In rare cases, young women might even ask an adept sister or aunt to actively influence her parents' considerations by pointing out that a certain relative would make a good fit with their daughter. And, most importantly, many young women avail themselves of the right to decline an unwanted proposal. Gilgit's young generation find their own way to integrate self-determined affection and companionship into a collectively organized marriage.

A Marriage of Liking

When I lived with Roqiya's family, she was about twenty-four years old, the second of six children.[1] Her oldest sister was already married and lived with her in-laws. Roqiya's family's house was in an old neighborhood in Gilgit, a large household that depended entirely on her father's rather meager income, but that valued education highly. All the children had exceptionally good grades, and

Roqiya followed her brother, who was a year older, to study at Karakoram International University (KIU) in Gilgit. To pursue her master's degree in chemistry, she had to commute to the university almost every weekday, and her family gave her a mobile phone so she could inform them in case of any troubles with buses or, worse, an outbreak of sectarian tensions. Roqiya never used it to get in touch with boys, not even her cousins, since she identified them, correctly, as *nā meḥram* (marriable according to Islamic law) and thus off limits for a direct relationship. Locals often neglect this Islamic rule, but Roqiya's observation of it demonstrated her education and piety. When I asked her directly about whether she was curious about boys, she waved them aside as a "disturbance": "I don't want to get married (*nikāḥ*) soon. There are some husbands who mind when their wives hang out with their cousins: 'Don't do this and that, don't go here and there!' I don't like that. I want to spend a little time of my life free, then I'll marry."

Such a lucid approach was typical for her. She was proud to be educated, ambitious, and self-determined, but also pious and modest in regard to men. Her behavior has allowed her to earn her parents' trust and acquired for her a maximum range of freedom. She travelled to the university alone, could roam the city with siblings to go shopping, visit the beauty parlor or relatives, and tutor younger students at home to earn some extra money, which she spent at her own discretion. Although her family was not affluent, Roqiya was such a qualified young woman that I suspected there must have been many wedding proposals looming. Her mother confirmed that the family had received a number of proposals, but explained they rejected all of them because of intolerable household environments, where, for example, an uncle was known to drink heavily, family members were involved in dubious politics, or a potential husband had not yet got a proper job. This situation suddenly changed one day, and as the months went by, I saw how young people can transform a formally arranged marriage into a love match.

Roqiya's oldest sister, also a university graduate, had a teaching job at a local college. One of her former classmates, a woman in her thirties, seemed keen to help her favorite aunt find a bride for her son, who had just started a promising job working for a government contractor. Because she knew of the family's exceptional reputation, the woman asked her old friend whether any of her younger sisters were eligible for marriage. Since both women considered the man a good match for Roqiya, they gradually involved their families—first their mothers, then their brothers—who started gathering information about the other side. It fell to the mothers to reveal these ongoing investigations to their husbands. Roqiya and her younger siblings were left in the dark (as was I). Only in retrospect did I learn that the potential husband's family had come over for a visit one afternoon when Roqiya and I were not home. The young man himself was not with them, because his job required a temporary stay in Lahore. Although he seemed

quite uninvolved in his family's enquiries, Roqiya's brothers later suggested that he had surely had a brief look at her from a distance during one of his visits to Gilgit, for example, by hanging out around the university bus stop in their neighborhood. Both families lived in the same part of town but had previously not been in touch with each other and could only trace a mutual kinship connection by going back several generations. Because both families lived in similar economic conditions and agreed on religious practices and moral attitudes, they quickly felt congenial with each other, and they liked that Roqiya and the young man had attained the same level of education, had similar interests, and compatible tempers. After about a month of concealed research that involved many of their close relatives and discussion between individual family members, the parents concluded that their children would be a good fit for each other. Only then did they inform Roqiya.

Roqiya, her mother, one of her younger sisters, and I were weeding the family's large wheat field in the early evening, a slow and arduous task. In the most incidental manner, Roqiya's mother mentioned that they had received a marriage proposal for her and were seriously considering it. The younger girl and I raised ourselves from our squatting positions at once and stared at Roqiya, awaiting her reaction. She, however, did not even lift her head and continued her labor. Their mother nervously glanced around and resumed her work; her unease was tangible when she hastily shared some details about the potential husband's family and career. After a short but tense pause, Roqiya's mother asked, "And, what do you think?" With a shrug of her shoulders, Roqiya expressed her consent. I was stunned. The whole matter was over as quickly as it had started, with no fuss or signs of curiosity from Roqiya. Instead, she stayed very calm; as her embodied *sharm* played out perfectly to guide her through this uncomfortable situation, she seemed incapable of anything else but reserve and indifference. Although the decision would significantly determine her future life and happiness, she withdrew from the conversation altogether—physically, through her posture and voice, but also emotionally, by distancing herself from an active engagement.

When I later asked Roqiya if she was as uninterested in her future husband as she had seemed to me in the situation, she sternly declared she completely trusted her parents and siblings to make the right choice for her; having lived in the world, they had better judgment than her. Whenever I brought the subject up over the next few days, she refused to take responsibility for the decision about whom to marry, and I could not observe any discrepancy between the statements she voiced and her actual emotions. She might have been a little more introverted and taciturn than usual, but she also seemed to enjoy the attention she was receiving as the family became increasingly excited about the match. Within days, Roqiya explained that any personal ambitions she once held had already been adjusted: "I always knew when I grow up this would happen; I will

also have a life partner. I might have said that I'll pick someone myself when I grow up, but then *ammī* and *abbū* liked this one so I will also like him."

Roqiya's brothers provided her with as much information about her future husband as possible; they knew she would be too reluctant and shy to ask for any by herself. As Roqiya soaked in every bit of information, she got more and more relaxed, and began sharing her assessments of her future husband and his family. "His parents are very sweet and I'm glad he seems to be ambitious in his job to take care of them." A young man who cared for his parents would surely be good to his wife, who shares his interests even more than the aging generation does. When the proposal was made official and a date for the *nikāḥ* set for the near future, the young couple had never actually met. Roqiya did not even get to see a photo; her younger brothers tried to find a clear one on Facebook but had to accept that he did not maintain his profile. As the choice had been made and the responsibility for decision-making off her shoulders, Roqiya could move on to the adjustment process, a task she was more familiar with: Although she had never explicitly expressed it, I could sense she was relieved that she did not have to wait long for her *nikāḥ* and would soon be able to tackle the new stage of her life more actively. I began to realize that she benefitted from her strategy of non-involvement. Because she emphasized her pious devotion, modesty toward men, and commitment to family, she could actively pursue a love relationship with her husband shortly after the *nikāḥ*. The commendably arranged marriage would help her counter any potential criticism of their growing intimacy.

On the morning of Roqiya's *nikāḥ,* a few respected family elders arrived at the house to pick up Roqiya's father and brothers to go to the mosque. Because women do not attend Gilgit's central mosque, neither the bride nor any of the other women of the family took part in the ceremony. Before leaving for the service, the oldest uncle came into the room where we women were sitting in our usual clothes, chatting as if it was just any ordinary day. Roqiya, who was otherwise very lively, suddenly became silent, pulled her veil deeper over her face, and lowered her head. The younger girls left, and her uncle sat down with her. "So child, have they all talked to you about this issue (*kām*)?" he asked her in a sincere, yet insistent voice. She answered with a barely perceptible nod. He leant toward her: "Do you agree (*Qabūl hai*)?" Three times he repeated his question and three times she whispered in Shina, "*Awa* (Yes)." He went on to ask for the amount of her dower (*mehr*), and then the men left. In the actual wedding, this uncle, as the elder of the family, would represent Roqiya as guardian (*vakīl*, or *gavā* in Shina), pass on her consent, and sign the marriage contract on her behalf. Many of my young friends in the area of Gilgit have never seen the final version of their marriage contracts. These official matters are the business of men whom they trust, and in case of divorce or other trouble the same men would have to deal with the consequences.

Roqiya's brothers had taken photos at the mosque, one with a digital camera and the other with his smartphone. When they returned from the ceremony, the women of the house excitedly flicked through the pictures, keen to get a close-up of the groom. "*Vāh*, *mīlīlo* (in Shina: how handsome). And he is taking it quite seriously," one of them commented, giggling about his stiff demeanor. Roqiya seemed overwhelmed and watched from afar as her sisters and two visiting cousins huddled around the devices. But in a quiet moment when most of the women were busy preparing tea, she clutched the camera and disappeared into the girls' sleeping room. When I joined her, she was zooming in on Mehdi. Now that he had a face, she also began using his name. While she was embarrassed to examine her husband in the presence of the older women, she enjoyed looking at the photos of the mosque ceremony with me and explaining what was happening.

The first time the couple actually met was some days later, in a traditional reception ceremony at Roqiya's house known as *hatī bishok* (kissing hands) in Shina or *angūṭhī rism* (ring ritual) in Urdu. Under the curious eyes of about eighty relatives from both families, the newlyweds were brought together with a short prayer. Dressed in the ceremonial clothes of bride and groom, they looked very intimidated as they sat next to one another on a decorated sofa that served as a stage in the middle of the room. Relatives took turns posing beside them for photos, but the couple did not dare to look in one other's direction even once. Mehdi seemed to be at least as nervous as Roqiya. When all the visitors had left in the late afternoon, Roqiya laughed at their stiff behavior and the cautious gap between them that was so clearly on view in all of the pictures I took.

One time, though, they had to touch each other, for the reception ceremony culminates in the exchange of rings between the couple. Mehdi gave Roqiya a golden ring with a big ruby, and she shyly slipped a relatively plain silver ring onto his finger. A few moments later, he solemnly handed her a new smartphone as a personal wedding gift. After the ceremony, she could now familiarize herself with her husband. Anticipating her interest, Mehdi had already filled it with dozens of photos of himself. Roqiya studied the pictures, some with his family, others with friends, and many of them selfies in which he gazed longingly toward the viewer, his young wife. His phone number was preinstalled on her new SIM card. And the following day, he sent his wife a first text message.

At first Roqiya was agitated, explaining to me that he should give her time to adjust to the new situation without pressure, but that changed when she realized he would have to go back to his posting in "downcountry" Pakistan soon. Their communication grew more intense. Within a few days, they were in almost constant touch through SMS, and Roqiya would walk out into the garden or lock herself in the bathroom for hours of nightly conversations. Because he did not want to leave his new wife in the middle of this intense phase, Mehdi extended his leave for two more weeks. He frequently came over

to visit Roqiya's family, bring her little gifts, and take her on outings. Their dates included an evening ride on his motorcycle to an ice-cream shop, a picnic to a neighboring valley in a rental car with some of her siblings, and a shopping trip to a newly opened retail store. Mehdi went to great lengths to win Roqiya's favor, as well as her family's trust. The more time they spent together, the more comfortable they were in each other's company. They started flirting and joking, even in front of peers, and exchanged conspiratorial glances when sitting in far corners at dinner time with Roqiya's parents. They really seemed to be a good fit and took an eager interest in each other.

When her older sister and I once teased Roqiya about how much Mehdi seemed to adore her, she admitted in a dreamy tone, "Yeah, I also like him (*Usko pasand kartī hūn*)," and looked at us happily, with a hint of pride. In Gilgit, such a direct acknowledgment of feeling amounts to a daring declaration of love, but since the couple had developed their affection entirely within the secure space of a model arranged marriage, Roqiya was confident in invoking emotions of love and devotion. At the same time, they were behaving in novel, self-determined ways, seeing one another during a phase that used to be characterized by avoidance, and displaying their love in front of others with confidence. Before having to return to Lahore, Mehdi asked to stay overnight at Roqiya's home. They must have talked about it first, as she informed her mother of his—and she claimed it was solely his—wish to spend the night. Her mother then talked to her husband, who granted Mehdi his conjugal rights. Although Roqiya's parents were not keen on the idea, they did not want to set themselves above Islamic law, which treats the *nikāḥ* as the official start of marriage.

A few weeks later Mehdi was back in the Punjab, and Roqiya, some of her sisters, and I were lounging on the thin mattresses in the sleeping room. "Beep, beep!" Her phone lit up, its vibrating tone followed by a special prayer tune for Muharram (the month of mourning in the Islamic calendar). For what seemed like the hundredth time in the last two hours, Roqiya had received a text message. She dived for the phone, which was currently lying next to her younger cousin, and smiled when she read Mehdi's words: "I swear I miss you, darling!" she whispered to me. She crawled closer and pulled the blanket over our heads to share more details. The extract of a chat in table 5[2] by another newlywed couple in a similar situation shows how quickly marital intimacy reaches a level of deep trust with little reserve. Even within the sanctuary of marriage, such communication makes clear that moral codes are shifting.

Although they had planned to wait a few more months before their *shādī*, Roqiya and Mehdi had to set an earlier date when they found out Roqiya was pregnant. As a bride beginning to show, she was the subject of gossip for a few weeks, and her mother was ashamed to convene such an "emergency" *shādī*. But many pious relatives consoled her with the reminder that sex after *nikāḥ* was completely permissible from a religious perspective. The usual festivities for a

TABLE 5

SMS Chat between a Married Couple in the Dating Phase between *nikāḥ* and *shādī*

Boy	*Girl*
"*miss uuu januu, maza ata ma udr b sharat karta koi*"	
I miss you, darling, it would be so much fun if I was there, I would also do some naughty things.	
	"*Kash janu ma wahan hoti . Kia sharat karta janu andaza laga*"
	Too bad, darling. If I was there. What naughty thing would you do, darling? Anything in mind?
"*Hahahahaha sahe kaha pesha sa lag jata necha hath data kis karta*"	
Hahaha, you're right. I would take/hold you from the back, put my hand down and kiss.	
	"*knjr knjr.tari kasm rat ko ma na khuwb ma dakha tha tm na aga . . . . . hahahahaha*"
	You pimp. I swear by you that I dreamt last night that you were in front . . . hahaha
"*Kasm khao kia hoa tha*"	
Do you swear? What happened?	
	"*jaisa ma Baji ke ak dafa hv ti.* *hahahahahahahaha. awa. pata ha ma itna maza ma ti*"
	The way I was at my sister's once. Hahaha. Yes. You know what, I was in great pleasure.
"*Kasm khao maza aia tja?*"	
Do you swear? Did you enjoy it?	
	"*han janu bhot.*"
	Yes, darling, very much.
"*Ummahhh*"	
Kiss [onomatopoeic].	
	"*luv uuuuuu*"

shādī include opulent dress, generous feasts for hundreds of guests, and lively dancing. Lacking the time to organize such lavish functions, Roqiya and Mehdi's wedding was conducted a little more modestly. They did not seem to mind, seeing themselves as "modern" Muslims who successfully combined a contemporary lifestyle with values of kinship solidarity and educated awareness for Islamic law. Because the local term for a love marriage, *pasand kī shādī*, includes the same word Roqiya used to describe her romantic feelings, *pasand* (liking), as well as the word for the social wedding, *shādī*, it was easy for the couple to perceive of their own relationship as a love match. Their *nikāḥ* might have been facilitated by their families, but their quick and passionate romance led them to see their *shādī* as their own love wedding.

In the area of Gilgit, romantic love, whenever it may develop, has become a decisive indicator of contemporary lifestyles. Even though a couple might not be very much involved in the matchmaking process, they value a loving relationship after their wedding, and many couples exercise their right to pursue romance as soon as they have the license and opportunity to do so. Most of the young couples I got to know characterized their love as an upright, honest feeling of affection, or *pasand*. *Pasand* does not depend on spontaneity or overwhelming desire; it lacks the desperation of *'ishq;* and it is not attached to a random person, but is rather a feeling of fondness that couples mutually and consciously develop: *Pasand* emerges from young people's active engagement in the venture of falling in love. They share personal details they have never disclosed to anyone from the opposite sex before, experience physical intimacy for what is usually the first time, and establish an exclusive bond of confidence. Romance, which had previously been associated with affairs external to marriage, is increasingly associated with wedlock as *pasand ki shādī*, or marriage of liking. Young people find ways to experience amorous feelings within a marriage that they hope will allow them to live happily ever after.

Harnessing Liminality

In Roqiya and Mehdi's story and many other hybrid marriages, the arrangement comes first, and love follows. But not all of the couples develop an intimate connection so quickly, and the liminal phase between *nikāḥ* and *shādī* allows for a range of practices between the old norm of avoiding one another and, at the other end of the spectrum, developing a sexual relationship before the bride moves to the groom's house. The younger generation finds various ways to balance what can be the competing values of their own interests, their parents' sentiments, social reputation, and Islamic law. They may pick the arguments they feel are best suited to help them in their individual projects, so that instead of discarding embodied conceptions of values completely, they enact them in ways that feel appropriate, legitimating certain behaviors and emotions. A young

woman from the outskirts of Gilgit described some of the ongoing local debates around the meanings of *nikāḥ* and *shādī*: "*Shādī* is just a ritual (*rism*), the real thing (*aṣl cīz*) is the *nikāḥ*. *Shādī* is for mother and father's happiness to do the *rukhṣat* (marriage procession) of their daughter, to make a bride out of her, and drop her at her new home. But to have children in one's own [parents'] house is a matter of *sharm*, people do not appreciate it and gossip."

When women like her try to explain shifting value systems, most of them attribute change to processes of *education*. This includes secular schooling, exposure to the world associated with college or university education, and an increasing awareness for "correct" interpretations of Islam according to respective schools of thought. For example, educated Shia scholars first propagated the Islamic teachings that remade the period between *nikāḥ* and *shādī* from a time of avoidance to interaction between spouses. The highest representative of Shiism in Gilgit goes even further: To counter lasciviousness and to meet the sexual needs of adolescents, he promotes *mut'a*, a Shiite form of short-term marriage, propagated by Iranian religious authorities that are widely accepted as central figures within the Shiite community. Gilgiti codes of honor and respectability do not condone *mut'a* but such Iranian directives still wind their ways into classes on marital life at neighborhood *madrasas*.

A twenty-one-year-old man from one of the valleys around Gilgit made a similar argument to me. Young people, he said, need a valve to channel their sexual energies. Boys chase girls, and girls, who are curious too, might surrender to these advances, leading to irresponsible and sinful actions that could be prevented if youths were married by *nikāḥ* in their late teens. His father interrupted, countering that while young couples might get on well for a few months, their personalities are still developing over these formative years. And if they grow apart, they would be stuck in an incompatible partnership for the rest of their lives. The father's concerns are certainly well-founded and even more relevant for young women entering a marriage. If a woman wants to leave an unhappy match, she needs her husband's cooperation. Even then, divorce is scandalous. A divorced woman is known to have lost her virginity, but far worse, she and her family are socially disgraced for having failed to sustain the relationship. Fear of such negative outcomes is an important factor in some people's doubts surrounding new forms of courtship.

According to my older interlocutors, changes in spousal contact between *nikāḥ* and *shādī* seem to have begun around the year 2000, when it became more common for couples to date after their *nikāḥ*. Such contact tended to take place not in Gilgit, but at the safe distance of university environments in Islamabad or Karachi. Although the families at home knew their children were dating between *nikāḥ* and *shādī*, they could excuse the behavior as following metropolitan norms, and thus as related to their children's relatively high socio-economic standing. As older and stricter generations passed away, more

couples claimed their right to meet each other after *nikāḥ*, and opposition gradually diminished. Nevertheless, emotions connected to embodied modesty provide guidance and safety, especially for young women, who are especially conscious of their vulnerability and appreciate the comfort zone a *shermātī* behavior provides them with.

Faced with new and competing codes of how future spouses should interact, many women are attuned not just to the possibility of personal liberty, but also to the potential for disorientation that the myriad of different premarital stages can bring with them. My young neighbor Gul explained her feelings after her betrothal to her first cousin, Liaqat: "*Manganī* (engagement) is not good. If you talk to each other when engaged, people mind it. *Dada* (paternal grandfather) says: 'Don't talk to Liaqat!' *Abbū* [father] says: 'Talk to Liaqat, sit with him!' I obey father's words but I don't like this engagement, everyone talks, even the ones who are not our relatives gossip when I leave the house with Liaqat: 'See, now Gul has grown up, she shouldn't go out.' *Nikāḥ* would be much better." From an Islamic point of view, Gul knew she can talk with her future spouse: they are not being physical, and her own father approves. Yet she was also aware of other peoples' concerns about premature marital intimacy, and this made her feel uncomfortable. In earlier generations, women like Shazia experienced similar emotional tension in the interim period between *nikāḥ* and *shādī;* now, those tensions flare up in the phase leading up to *nikāḥ*. Gul hoped to quickly enter the next stage of the marriage process to dissolve such insecurities.

Gul's unease was intensified by the fact that, as her first cousin, Liaqat had always been tightly integrated into her family's daily life and could hardly be avoided after their parents agreed on the match. Her classificatory brother, with whom she had a close and informal relationship, suddenly turned into a marriageable person. Cousins are *nā meḥram* in Islam, which means they are potential spouses and do not belong to the inner circle of the family. People in the area of Gilgit, however, often cherish close relationships between both sexes within the extended family. When parents finalize a marriage proposal, the cousins' formerly playful and open relationship usually turns stiff and timid, reflecting the sudden inversion of roles. Gul and Liaqat's engagement was a case in point. To turn consanguine relatives into affines, it is first necessary for the couple to distance themselves a step before then getting closer in an altered mode. Another Gilgiti bride expressed her discomfort with this process too. "Isn't it strange? When he came to our house a few weeks ago I called him *kākā* (older brother), now he is . . . ," she stopped, cast down her eyes bashfully and muttered: "I feel embarrassed (*Mujhe sharm ātī hai*) when I suddenly have to call him by his name." To speak the name of her future husband suggested a kind of closeness that was bound up with the intimacy of a marital relationship. She added that she felt even shier in front of her cousin-spouse than she could have possibly felt with a total stranger, because he already knew her so well—not as a wife,

but as a sister. After about half a year of awkward interactions with the man she now knew as her future spouse, she began to accept their new roles and to develop a romantic interest toward him. The performance of their *nikāḥ* might have improved their situation. When friends and relatives recognize a relationship, it helps the couple normalize.

In rare cases, families choose to defer such public acknowledgement of a couple's match, especially when the intended spouses are cousins whose households live and work together closely. In the first months of their engagement, Gul and Liaqat's families initially kept their match a secret, and almost seemed to ignore their future conjugal relationship. This gave them the freedom to develop a new closeness without surveillance by, or objections from, the wider public. Gul could continue visiting her husband-to-be's house, just as she had before the engagement, an action that in the not-too-distant past might have been completely out of question. The implementation of norms obviously underlies a high degree of flexibility by the people who enact them.

Even as many young couples in the area of Gilgit are enthusiastic to get to know one another before their *shādī* or even their *nikāḥ*, other girls categorically refused to interact with their husbands until they were "properly" married. I interviewed a young nurse who maintained this stance after her *nikāḥ*. She explained that the issue was not that she did not like her husband, but that she wanted to avoid the feeling of embarrassment that she associated with conjugal intimacy. When mutual friends tried to intervene and hand her a mobile phone with her husband on the line, she got so mad that she threatened to break it. "After the *shādī* I have no choice, I have to talk to him. What can I do, *bas*? But now I don't want to."

The younger brother in one of my host families in Gilgit endured a long phase of engagement before his *nikāḥ* was conducted. He went to his fiancée's house with a large cake on her birthday, but to his disappointment he was politely received by her mother, his distant aunt, who seated him in the guest room where only the men of the household visited with him. Because the bride's family considered it inappropriate for the couple to interact—both were still teenagers—he tried to find other ways to attach himself to her. With the help of his sister, for example, he managed to acquire his future wife's photo on his mobile phone. For many days I saw him reach for his phone while at home. Again and again he typed in the password and stared at her picture, sometimes kissing the screen or pressing the phone to his chest. When I asked his fiancée about her feelings for him, her manner seemed to indicate a much lower level of attachment, her *sharm* verging on emotional indifference. Yet when she heard about his gestures of affection, she was visibly pleased and touched. Such dynamics mirror Bollywood love stories, in which a passionate man woos a modest, noble young woman with persistent declarations of commitment. Figure 15, a graphic



FIGURE 15 Customized graphic containing the name of the beloved. Graphic from interlocutor's phone.

Photo by the author.

from the mobile of one of my interlocutors, visualizes how a young bride also cultivates the love for her husband-to-be.

In accordance with wider societal processes, mobile phones are the most important facilitator for emotional bonding in the new phase of conjugal dating. While academic research on mobiles often emphasizes the potential anonymity of connections, which can allow users to safely express what they otherwise might keep to themselves (Andersen 2013; Pertierra 2005), most conversing parties in the area of Gilgit are not strangers to one another. Their mobile connections build upon already-established, socially acceptable lines of communication, thus are less mobile than their potential might imply. Yet many people argue that the privacy mobile phones engender can corrupt girls, and I even heard people demonize the phone as "Satan's little brother" (in Shina: *Shaitān'e cūno ɣa*). What public discourse in Gilgit categorizes as the incarnation of Satan, struck me as a way to simplify complex processes relating to the reframing of love concepts. Education and Islamic teachings, geographic mobility, TV, and social media all shape and are shaped by conceptions of love and marriage. Modesty is not degenerating but being reshaped within the complex web of contemporary influences. While technology itself does not create social change, it certainly empowers young couples to negotiate and enact new ideas and relationships with more independence than before.

To mitigate against accusations of the mobile phone corrupting them, the younger generation protects fundamental ideals of gender segregation by using phones not to have affairs, but to develop conjugal intimacy. To distance themselves from base sexual motives, they frame their communication as part of virtuous, romantic love. Muslim women in Gilgit, like those Elisabetta Costa (2016) and Laura Menin (2018) have studied in Turkey and Morocco, enact a respectable and moral self "*through* and not *in spite of*" (Menin 2018, 67, emphasis in original) mediated interactions with men. To consolidate dubious ideas with interpretations of Islamic modesty, girls only meet their suitors in public places, if at all, and avoid touch. Mobile phones liberate them to act upon their desires for intimacy within structures that legitimate such interactions: Technology only facilitates or helps people *attain* what they earlier did not have the means to (cf. Miller and Sinanan 2012). Especially for Gilgit-Baltistan's Shia community, that means communication can begin once the marriage has been solemnized by *nikāḥ*. Mobile phones allow partners to interact in a virtual environment that offers distance and privacy at the same time, where they are less prone to be affected with feelings of *sharm* and find it easier to develop intimacy. Sitting in her own home, hiding behind a technological device, a young woman has a greater sense of security than an in-person interaction would allow.

In a panoramic study of the mobile landscape in India, Assa Doron and Robin Jeffrey (2013) come to the same conclusion: Couples increasingly use

phones to bond before their marriage is fully implemented. This way, they are better prepared for their life together, which is especially important for a bride arriving in a new family: an intimate complicity with her husband can disempower her in-laws. A young woman from Gilgit's suburbs, who had recently moved to her husband's, told me that mobile phones have brought her an immense advantage: "If there weren't mobiles, it would feel as if I didn't know him. When we suddenly got engaged, I didn't know anything about him. It would have been really difficult to adjust in his house like that. But we started talking (*gapshap*) on the phone, sometimes went out and met each other, so that we got used to each other (*ek dūsre kī 'adat 'adī ho ga'ī*)."

Many couples in the area of Gilgit stay in continuous contact through their phones, creating what Christian Licoppe calls "connected presence" (2004). Because they do not yet have a pool of shared memories to draw upon, the young women and their husbands use such "mediated interaction" (Licoppe 2004, 136) to narrate their everyday lives for their partners to the extent that, as one of my interlocutors put it, "it feels almost as if he was here." Sharing little everyday experiences that they do not undergo together serve to forge social relations; it is a way to take part in the other's life. As Licoppe writes: "Each of these mediated interactions reactivates, reaffirms, and reconfigures the relationship" (138). Roqiya summarized the bulk of her and Mehdi's SMS messages as follows: "Mostly it is just: How is everyone? What are you doing? I say, 'I just ate'. If I have time he will start to talk. I will tell him what food I prepared today. 'Drink milk,' he sometimes says. Then he asks me how the other family members are. And occasionally, for the fun of it, we get into more personal things." With increasing levels of attachment, couples may also affirm their affection with abundant "I love yous" and more rarely even with accounts of their erotic desire (see table 5).

My friends in Gilgit often judged the strength of a relationship not by the depth of couples' communication, but by the frequency of messages exchanged. Like Roqiya, their SMS conversations with their (future) husbands were trivial—"conversations about nothing" (Crawford 2009, 253)—but they established and upheld intimacy. Some of the young spouses I interviewed sent one another two to three hundred messages a day, and an occasional call could take up to two hours. "We talk at night, when I'm back from uni and him from the office. If I don't have to do any work [in the house], we keep on talking and talking," a young wife in one of the households I lived in for some weeks told me. When I mentioned that I hardly ever noticed her speaking on the phone, especially not for such long spans of time, she admitted that she preferred to hold these conversations secretly; for reasons of privacy, she withdraws into the dark, empty guest room or the pantry behind the kitchen.

Although their relationships are legitimate, most young spouses awaiting their *shādī* follow similar practices and obscure the intensity and frequency of

their intimate connection from others. Given the personal nature of young spouses' exchange, the girl felt shy about anyone witnessing her growing intimacy with her husband; at the same time, her withdrawal signaled her transition from her natal family into her affinal family, which will eventually be her "own." At the same time, her behavior resembles marital *parda*, which requires partners to maintain distance when in front of others. A certain level of secrecy, however, also adds to the excitement of the newly married couple and makes them accomplices against older generations.

When chatting, whether aloud or by text, couples establish and fill an ambiguous space between them. As one of my interlocutors described it: "It feels like a *third space* . . . a mobile world (*mobile kī dunyā*). In this space, only the voices meet, while the faces appear in the mind." Because this space is not distinct from real-life relationships, the connections it helps build are immediate, affective, and emotional. A girl from one of Gilgit's valleys illustrated it as follows: "When I write messages and, for example, have to laugh, the other's face comes to my mind. If the other person says that I'm here or there, in a shop, or eating apricots, or whatever, I can picture them without seeing; . . . that she would be laughing like that, they might be sitting in the shop like that, and so on." The immediacy and privacy of conversations, even when at distance and technologically mediated, thus leaves both partners affected. Others might shy away from becoming so involved. Most young women who use mobile communication in the interim phase between *nikāḥ* and *shādī* have a measure of control over their interactions with their new husband. Although wives are certainly influenced by normative expectations such as obedience to their husbands or the need to keep them happy, they can draw on both older and newer sets of morals to justify how intensive their phone contact will be. This could mean demanding care and attention from their spouse on the one hand, or blaming their parents' restrictions for their reluctance to communicate on the other. The relative freedom that girls experience in the interaction with their (future) spouses allows them to tease out new roles for themselves and to enact dreams of conjugal intimacy and companionship. One of my interlocutors, who had just had her first child after moving into her husband's family, described the growing love and affection between partners as a logical consequence of the thrill of the first meetings in this "free" dating period:

> After the *nikāḥ* there is usually a lot of *pyār*. You don't know his bad habits yet, everything is new. It is a lot of fun (*maza ātā hai*) to talk, to sit together. Especially if he cannot come regularly, there will be a lot of love. But after the *shādī* you are together the whole time, you find out his negative sides and it will be difficult. In the *nikāḥ* phase there is a lot of *enjoyment*. Once you're together all the time after *shādī*, you don't enjoy the little things anymore. Then both are busy in their own work, have to take care of children, for example, and don't have time for each other.

The courtship phase does not yet carry the burdens of a girl's new role as daughter-in-law and the daily responsibilities of married life, a factor many older women also appreciate. They recognize the advantages for young wives and, as long as the decision to marry was taken before the couple started interacting, they sympathize. While some older people complain about the lack of distance and modesty between *nikāḥ* and *shādī* for Shia, or between engagement and wedding for Sunni and Ismaili youth, the bulk of society in and around Gilgit is more and more accepting of spousal contact during this interim period, and of the mobile phones that facilitate it. Love is literally at young peoples' fingertips, although the emotion itself has a much longer history.

Promoting Romance

While spousal contact after *nikāḥ* is increasingly accepted in Gilgit, premarital romance between girls and boys, and the free choice of one's partner remain taboo. Yet where cousin relationships are concerned, the prohibition on interaction without family consent is only laxly enforced. Since "cousin" is a category that can apply to even fairly distant relatives, girls have the chance to interact with and form opinions about possible marriage candidates, though most told me they did not engage in such behavior. Yet in cases where cousins' own, self-directed romantic attachment successfully turned into marriage, some young wives confessed their longstanding feelings. Ammara Maqsood (2021) reports a similar manner from her middle-class interlocutors in the Pakistani metropolis of Lahore who seek to develop a relationship within familiar networks. Framing secret courtships preceding marriage as having come to an "understanding" with a potential spouse, they want to signal "sincerity and seriousness of intention" (5). Just like in the area of Gilgit, these young and educated women combine reasoned decision with romantic intimacy, and thus successfully integrate—but also reaffirm—individual as well as collective interests.

Aliya's *nikāḥ* with Salim, for example, marked the happy ending of a long love story. It took place in 2014, when Aliya was about twenty years old. She and Salim were relatives of about the same age who had spent a lot of time during their childhood and teenage years together. When they were young teenagers, they started to exchange flirtatious looks, and later exchanged letters on the way to school. While Salim poured out his heart in long, emotional descriptions, Aliya would answer in a few vague, unassertive lines: On paper theirs was a typical unidirectional romance of a passionate *'ishq*-stricken male lover chasing the exemplary, modest woman of his dreams. Aliya's and Salim's parents did not notice their ongoing romance, so they could interact quite freely within the age group of their siblings and cousins, but their secret letters risked revealing their illicit attachment. On special

occasions, Salim sometimes even gave Aliya a little gift, such as a teddy bear, which she meticulously stored alongside the letters in a pretty jewelry box. When Aliya showed me her collection of tightly folded pages and Eid-cards (for the religious holiday), I noticed phrases such as "my sweet, beautiful flower" or "miss you, kiss you." She would open the box whenever she needed a warm reminder of their romantic feelings. However, she told me, their affair stayed relatively innocent. "I never touched Salim, we only talked," she insisted. Over the years their communication channels extended to phone calls on a landline—which they used, among other things, to tell the other one to come over when no adults were present—and later to text messages, for which Aliya used her illiterate mother's mobile.

On a cold winter evening, I sat with Aliya and her family members around the warm oven, all of us busy with different tasks. Aliya repeatedly looked up to check if the adults were occupied, and when she was certain no one would notice, I saw her grab one of the mobile phones lying around. She sent Salim a quick text message—"it's me"—to let him know who was contacting him from the unknown number. The two exchanged a few messages, which she immediately deleted. When the phone's battery suddenly died, Aliya looked anxious. The power was off, so she could not charge the phone to tell Salim that she would no longer be available. When the owner of the phone, Aliya's mother, charged it and switched it on again later, Salim's last messages might come through and reveal Aliya's transgression. Noticing me watching her, Aliya whispered to me that she would just have to get up early to check the phone before her mother could ask anyone to read the new message. She regained her calm so that her family members would not notice that anything had happened. Along with one of her older sisters and some of the cousins her age, I was one of Aliya's accomplices, helping to cover up what seemed like fairly harmless interactions between Aliya and Salim. Her older sister, who had more sway among the adults of the family, sometimes tried to suggest to her parents that Salim might be a good match for Aliya. They, however, did not seem to take the hint.

Because Aliya was a very beautiful girl from a well-respected family, she received many marriage proposals. She rejected all of them. Her parents grew increasingly distressed, and had to turn down their own, upset relatives without even knowing their daughter's reason. When Aliya refused a proposal from an older, respected relative, she and Salim feared their own chances at happiness together were destroyed. Salim could not offend his "uncle" by pursuing the same girl this senior figure had wanted to marry. And Salim could not fathom talking openly with his parents about his desires. His conservative father would have been repelled. If, after declining Salim's affluent relative, Aliya accepted Salim, still at college and not considered to be of marrying age, it would be obvious that they had a prior romance, and she would be outed as an emotionally unrestrained, even vulgar daughter-in-law.

Aliya retreated into her sorrow, which she expected she would overcome after one or two years. Although Salim never directly asked her to elope, she ruled out this possibility: "I told him that I love *ammī* and *abbū* more, then comes my love for him." Salim responded by trying to find a way to convey his wishes to his parents, working intently on his studies to become a lawyer to impress with his job prospects, and begging Aliya to reconsider her decision. He sent her countless messages, paid visits, and brought small gifts, though she tried her best to avoid him. Her unattainability and fidelity to family values seemed only to increase her allure. Then, miraculously, destiny intervened. Salim's uncle, one of the honorable elders of both families, found one of their love letters and on his deathbed demanded his relatives arrange the wedding of the two. Aliya was never quite sure what the motivation for his good will was. She assumed that he had liked her because she had taken good care of him during his illness, and that, since love letters might indicate a platonic relationship, he may not have judged her and Salim too harshly. Aliya's older sister suspected that their uncle had suffered from an unhappy marriage all his life and dealt with his own frustrations by recognizing the potential for happiness in others. After Salim's family posed the *rishta* (marriage proposal) for Aliya, her father assumed that his obedient and modest daughter would not speak openly to him. She explained: "*Abbū* (father) asked me if I was happy with this *rishta*. In his presence I didn't say anything. Then he sent my brother. When my brother came to me and asked if I liked the suggested relation, I said that I wouldn't talk to him [Salim] if I didn't like him but I do talk to him, so he should take me [as his wife]."

Even though Aliya and Salim's marriage is a testimony to their own willpower, Aliya felt ashamed and humiliated after their first kiss, which took place after their proper *nikāḥ*. In retrospect, she says she could not enjoy these first moments of physical intimacy because she felt she polluted herself, as well as their precious love, with mundane desire. Although religiously sanctioned, the couples' new physicality broke the earlier spell of their premarital affection that was so intricately connected to Aliya's unattainability. But as she became accustomed to marriage, her attitude toward sexuality changed. Many nights, when Salim stayed over in her parents' guest room, Aliya would sneak in and out when the rest of the household was asleep. Their joint exploration of their sexuality created immense trust between them.

When Aliya and I talked about her family, she always emphasized that her parents never had to set strict rules for their children because they could "*trust*" them. She was confident in the decency and innocence of her love relationship with Salim, and proud that they had proven themselves by honoring their roles within the family instead of taking reckless action. This helped cushion her from negative judgments, although, as one of Aliya's cousins remarked, it was easy enough to see that there must have been premarital attraction: "She thinks she

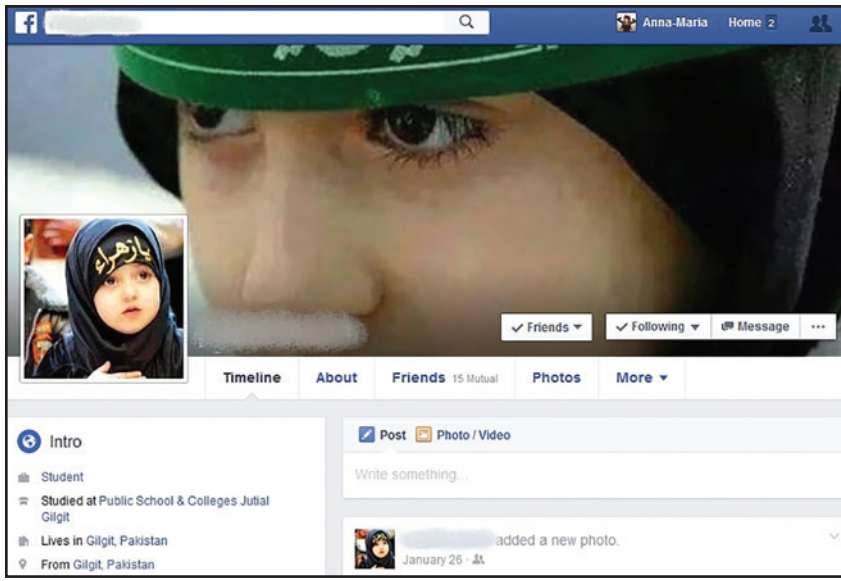


FIGURE 16 Facebook profile of a young woman from Gilgit.
Photo by the author.

is very smart (*tez*). But when she suddenly said 'yes' to Salim's proposal, even uncle must have realized that theirs was a love marriage." Had Aliya's father been aware of her attachment beforehand, however, he might have been compelled to punish her for her immodest attitude. Aliya pointed out that she would also have never dared to speak to her mother about it; her mother would die of shame if she ever knew of the premarital attraction. In my interpretation, this suggested that at least on some level, Aliya thought she had done something wrong. Fortunately, Aliya's agency was elegantly blurred by Salim's uncle's wish for their union, so her family could turn a blind eye to any contradictions.

Whether young women in the area of Gilgit quietly pursue their own choice of spouse or, more typically, agree to an arranged match, they embrace what they see as "modern" love marriages. Although the core values of no sex outside of marriage and the family decision about a wedding remained unquestioned, young people have found ways to creatively empower themselves: They may experience romantic intimacy within the sanctuary of *nikāḥ* and take an active stance in developing a companionate marital relationship before *shadī*. In the pursuit of marital romance, women proactively frame and enact their fortune: By adjusting their emotional posture, they manage to develop the relationship they desire with their (future) husbands. This renegotiation takes place within established cultural structures that inhabit and inhibit individual actors. As

my observations show, most of the more intense interactions between an unmarried girl and boy that involved mobile phones were actually extensions of relationships of mutual affection that had begun in each other's presence, such as Aliya and Salim's. Mobile connections in Gilgit mainly extend—and intensify—pre-existing relationships, such as a couple that met in the *tuition centre* (institutes for private instruction), or two cousins who started flirting during family gatherings.

Although the use of smartphones and with them the popularity of Facebook has spread widely over the last few years, romantic encounters still mainly happen through mobile phones' text messaging services. Because women often lack access to public wi-fi facilities, such as in hotels, or the necessary *balance* for internet data packages, their online activity, like their real-life mobility, is restricted. Writing about the Pakistani Punjab, Schoemaker (2015, 2016) therefore argues that women are additionally marginalized by internet technology enforcing gender roles and female seclusion. He found that most women willingly concede to the tacit social pressure to limit the sharing of personal information and keeping their faces in *parda* to protect their reputation. This holds for the area of Gilgit as well, where girls mainly remain invisible on Facebook. Some use fake variations of their names, and almost none of them show their photo. For their profile pictures they mostly use white babies, fashion models, and colorful backgrounds with written proverbs—all images they have found online. Through this tactic, young women comply with rules of gender segregation while still creatively finding strategies to express their interests, participate in new trends, and craft a sense of self. New communication technologies allow people to negotiate novel ideas within existing cultural frameworks, and while they may not abandon those norms, they can push at, and change, their boundaries.

As conjugal intimacy that is sanctioned by *nikāḥ* or at least the intention to marry the young generation maintains Islamic ideals around gender segregation and respectability. Moreover, couples use mobile phones and the internet to implement and provide proof of virtuously romantic or companionate love. For young spouses, Facebook, for example, serves as a medium to advertise—and normalize—the display of conjugal affection. To like or upload one's husband's picture can be regarded as special proof of love and support, as one lays open the connection to him. Figure 17 shows a picture of a married couple holding hands, posted by the young wife for their anniversary. She openly displays her happiness, an act that would have been taboo a few years ago.

The more young women are exposed to various stimuli from education, development discourse, Islamic teachings, media consumption, and exposure to the outside world, the more confident they become. Consequently, many women in the area of Gilgit are less restrictive with their own emotional regime of

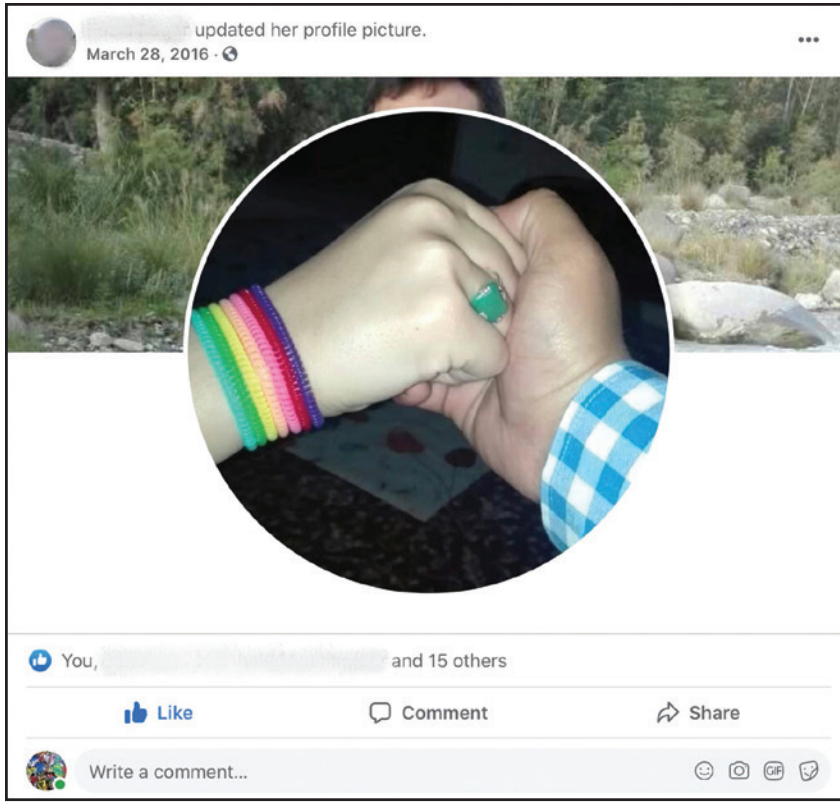


FIGURE 17 Facebook status update of a young woman from Gilgit. Photo by the author.

feeling and expression, share their thoughts more freely with their partners, and are less ashamed about endorsing their desire for sexual pleasure. As girls increasingly promote romance in the early stages of a marriage engagement, the traditional negation of emotionality enters into an interesting tension with newer ideas that permit emotions a more prominent role. If women do not feel as much need to distance themselves from their "natural" irrationality, and can experience love in a similar manner as their male counterparts, they may be becoming more conscious of their self-worth, and rejecting their lower place in the social hierarchy. Many husbands support these changes by taking an eager interest in their wives' thoughts, by sanctioning their behavior, and by embracing reciprocal pleasures. Women's pursuit of conjugal romance is less dramatic than Kirmani's (2020) examples of women defying the men-only order of public space, but it is building women's confidence, working on sensitive power shifts within marriage, and slowly changing social imperatives of gender roles.

The Future of Marriage?

Reflecting current trends and tensions around "love," a television commercial that aired in Pakistan for the Eid al-Fitr 2015 religious holiday featured a cartoon teacup with a female voice that protests when old-style fresh milk, represented by a male voice, is about to be poured into its contents of black tea. Instead, it demands Tarang brand packaged milk, proclaiming: "I don't want an arranged, I want a love marriage."[3] The advertisement associates the promotion of innovative products with the renegotiation of values relating to marriage, gender relations, kinship, and love, therefore implicitly portraying self-determined love marriages as a desirable, progressive development. Religious and cultural conservatives are alarmed by such a normalization of romance. In both India and Pakistan, protests against the celebration of Valentine's Day have been held for the last two decades, with the belief that young peoples' public acknowledgment of love—whether sanctioned by marriage or not—proves that local codes have been infiltrated by immoral global values (Derné 2000, 39).

Yet in Gilgit-Baltistan, most actual relationships among young people follow Islamic teachings by taking place after their *nikāḥ* or formal engagement. For her women interlocutors in Bangladesh, Julia Qermezi Huang (2017) also noted that new models of internal *parda* become even more important since mobile phones can penetrate a girl's heart no matter how physically secluded she lives. She shows that cell phones are neither emancipatory in a modernist sense nor do users solely integrate them in existing social frameworks, but they enable a conscious and responsible renegotiation of ethical norms and values. Her interlocutors use the term "digital" as synonymous with educated, conscious, and empowered (Qermezi Huang 2017, 113). This book has made a similar argument for the active renegotiation of love and intimacy as both a contemporary and aspired form of marriage. While in the area of Gilgit the liminal phase before *shādī* used to be characterized by distance, for more and more young couples, it has become a phase in which to develop intimacy and romantic love. My interlocutors called this love *pasand*, *khush*, or *pyār*, and it combines aspects of both the grown or familial affection of *moḥabbat* and the passionate devotion of *'ishq*. Yet it is distinct from both of these feelings, which are characterized by external control: *moḥabbat*, by family structures, and *'ishq*, by a mysterious higher power. The romantic love of *pasand*, however, involves the mutual consent and motivation of the couple. It is part of what other anthropologists have seen as a push for the "democratization" of marriage (Giddens 1992) throughout the Muslim world and South Asia, with a sense that marriage can hold "egalitarian potential" (Grover 2011, 3).

The older women I got to know clearly took active roles in their everyday lives as well, and many of them indicated affection for the husbands. But they located



FIGURE 18 Campaign against Valentine's Day in Rawalpindi.
Photo by the author.

much of their agency in their ability to suppress, rather than cultivate, feelings, and were particularly proud of the aptitude to endure difficult situations. Young women today also embody *sharm,* a feeling of respectability that combines all levels of the body and mind, both conscious and unconscious. But as they actively forge conjugal intimacy with their future spouses, women are also renegotiating such emotions. Depending on their individual personalities and domestic environments, young women who communicate with their husbands before they live together contribute to shifts in gender relations. They mobilize the rhetoric of love for more mutuality and equality and make subtle demands that suggest—however informally—a grassroots feminist agenda. The wide range of moral codes available to them, and their unwritten, ambiguous character, allows women to reshape conjugal intimacy while behaving in socially acceptable ways. Instead of overthrowing established norms and values, girls test, adjust, and stretch boundaries, thus actively contributing to new interpretations of Islam, the renegotiation of gender roles, and the shifting of power dynamics within the family.

Young women's growing emotional expectations of marriage spur public fears of moral corruption, loose morals that might lead to instability of marriage. On the other hand, the threat of failure puts more pressure on couples to establish a successful companionship. Figure 19, a screenshot from a Gilgit woman's



FIGURE 19 Screenshot of a middle-aged woman's Facebook post.
Photo by the author.

Facebook wall, poignantly captures local women's awareness of the potential for failure, as well as their demand, and indeed their right, to leave an unhappy marriage: "Dear Parents, please welcome your daughters back from failed marriages. A divorced daughter is better than a dead daughter [praying hands emoji]." While it is not clear if the post alludes to domestic abuse, honor killings, or a woman's desperate suicide, the open acknowledgment of potential problems sends a strong message to accept women with all their emotions, instead of requesting them to settle into the situation. Accompanied by the picture of a lonely young woman with smudged makeup, the illustration eliminates any doubts about the fact that women's feelings matter.

Such depictions of failure allow interference about expectations of women's empowerment, hopes, and opportunities that resonate with how other scholars observe love and companionate marriage as the democratization of the interpersonal domain that sees intimate relationships characterized by negotiated, fair, and equal rights and obligations, based on trust instead of control. Nonetheless, local context prepares the ground for any change, including the reception of globalized ideas of love. The Facebook post, for example, shows the importance of family and kin support for women. As ethnographic accounts have revealed, most individuals in the area of Gilgit perceive of themselves as embedded in, and constituted by, their interaction with others. When women discuss one another's romantic lives and individual desires, they are valuing social ties just as much as their personal desires, if not more. A comment from one of my interlocutors about her sister's close involvement with her husband after *nikāḥ* captures the divergence of morals, as well as the new order's gradual acceptance: "A few people's minds are still set like this, they think in the old way (*purānī soc*). There are one or two who have changed their mind according to the time, like my father. In the beginning he also did not like it [contact after *shādī*], but now Salim and Aliya ride the motorbike in front of him and he does not say anything." Individual actors recognize loopholes and ambiguities in norms, using them to reconfigure what counts as socially acceptable behavior. By staying attuned to a cultural politics of the sensible, I have tried to show how people are shaped by, as well as actively influence, both practice and discourse. Once my interlocutors and I could move from relatively impersonal conversations at the generalizing level of public debates to more empathic and reflective modes of exchange, quite a few women told me they hold the individual accountable for her acts and emotions, thus their remaking of marital culture and conjugal love would not pass unnoticed.

Looking at the inconspicuous level of couple relationships and family politics, with a special attention to young women's active contributions and struggles, also serves to humanize "*the* Muslim woman," who is often generalized, stigmatized, and victimized. And my interlocutors in and around Gilgit were very aware of the much-needed change of perspective, as one young woman once

directly addressed my possible future readers: "From the outside you say the house [i.e., family or community] is like that and that. When we go inside, then it's not as bad as people criticize from the outside."

People recognize that they are themselves shaped by socio-historic forces, and still they make the most out of their circumstances and opportunities. They are continuously affected by countless factors that make themselves known through sensible perception, that mark them, and that they can draw on to understand, justify, or change their ideas and behavior. Some of the people I got to know in Gilgit stressed the importance of customary concepts of honor, others saw themselves molded by their time at university, their views on economic (in) dependence, or the TV dramas and Bollywood movies they watched in clips on their phones. With further education and empowerment agendas promoted by the development sector, a growing number of youths demand more participation in decision-making processes. As they see themselves more capable of adhering to the "correct" interpretation of religious scriptures and dogmas than their parents' generation, they have the leverage to negotiate and enact ideas about love as a project of emancipation within the family.

GLOSSARY

ʻabāya. full cloak, mostly black; in Gilgit often referred to as *burqa*

abbū. father

Aga Khan. spiritual leader of the Ismaili sect, currently the ruler Prince Karim IV

ammī. mother

ʻaql. Islamic concept of reason

baghairat. honorless

bāhar. outside

balance. local slang for prepaid mobile phone credit

bardāsht karnā. to tolerate, persevere and "arrange" oneself in difficult circumstances; signaling self-adjustment

besharm. shameless

bhāgnā. elope

burqa. Pakhtun-style full body cover; in Gilgit used to describe *ʻabāya*

cādr. bigger version of *dūpaṭa* veil, about 1.5 m×2.5 m

chowk. crossroads, central point in the neighborhood

dastarkhān. tablecloth on the floor that demarcates an imaginary table

dayyal. Shina term for a shaman who has the ability to connect to the fairy world; known as

bīṭān in the neighboring Burushaski region

dil. heart

dūpaṭa. female headscarf, roughly 1 m×2.3 m

Eid. religious holiday

fitna. Islamic concept of social chaos

ghairat. self-respect, honor

ghusl. ablution shower to cleanse oneself of pollution by bodily fluids such as sperm or menstruation

ghussa. anger

hadith. records of the Prophet's words and actions

imām. among Sunnis, referring to religious authority; for Shias, successors of Muhammad and leaders of the community

'ishq. passionate love with strong characteristics of longing and self-negation

Ismaili. formally a branch of Shia Islam; followers of the Aga Khan as a direct descendant of Prophet Muhammad

'izzat. a family's collective honor and reputation

jāhil. ignorant, illiterate, signaling "backward" manner

jehez. dowry; furniture and jewelry given to a bride by her parents (in contrast to bride wealth that is given to a girl's parents by the groom's family)

jin. ghost or other supernatural spirit

jirga. extralegal form of negotiating peace through consensus by an assembly of village elders and dignitaries

kākā/kākī. older brother/sister in Shina

kām. work (noun)

khayāl rakhnā. to take good care

khulā. woman-initiated Islamic divorce

khush. literally "happiness" in Urdu and Shina, it describes a conjugal affection, synonymous with a marriage based on *pasand* (liking) or *pyār* (romantic love)

lambadār. respected village head

madrasa. religious school

majbūrī. being obliged or bound to (do) something; signaling endurance

mangani. formal wedding engagement

maulvī /maulana. Sunni religious scholar

mehndī. henna patterns on women's hands and feet, as well as a wedding function to bless the couple before the marriage is implemented through *rukhṣat*

mehr. Islamic dower that wife is entitled to, integral part of *nikāḥ nāma*

moḥabbat. loving attachment as affection that grows among family members, as well as spouses; in Shina also simply referred to *khush* (happiness)

moḥalla. neighborhood

Muhammad. last and most important prophet in Islam who revealed God's direction and guidance in the verses of the Qur'an

Muslim Family Laws Ordinance (MFLO). Pakistani state legislation fundamentally regulating family matters, ratified in 1961

mut'a. short-term marriage within Shiite Islam

nā meḥram. potential mate, person of the opposite sex who are not forbidden to marry (in contrast to immediate family members in the direct line); *parda* rules apply to this group of marriageable people

nafs. Islamic concept of ego and passion

na't. religious poetry sung in praise of Prophet Muhammad

nikāḥ. legal Islamic wedding

nikāḥ nāma. Islamic marriage contract

niqāb. facial cover

pāgal. crazy

parda. gender segregation and veiling of women

parī. pure fairy being, living in parallel world on top of the mountains

pasand kī shādī. marriage arrangement based on premarital attachment; a "marriage of liking"

pyār. romantic love, newly emerging amalgamate of *'ishq* and *moḥabbat*

qismat. each person's God-determined destiny that is partial to believers' influence by way of dealing with given circumstances

qōm. local kinship groups or lineages that traditionally correspond with occupational hierarchies; previously often equated with caste system; in the area of Gilgit predominantly consisting of Shin, Yeshkun, and Dom, as well as *sayyids* and Kashmiri

Qur'an. central religious book of Islam, revealed to Muhammad by God (Allah), often romanized as Koran or Quran

rishta. literally meaning relation, in the context of weddings it stands for the groom's family's initial inquiry and proposal of marriage

roṭī. flat bread

rukhṣat. integral part of the *shādī* celebration, when the bride moves to the groom's house

ṣadiqa. Islamic charity, sharing food with the poor

sayyid. religious dignitary and descendant of Prophet Muhammad

shādī. social implementation and celebration of a wedding

shalvār qamīẓ. South Asian standard dress, consisting of baggy, pyjama-like trousers and a wide, knee-length shirt

shariat. Islamic law; Persian version of Arabic *shariah* that is commonly used in South Asia

sharm. broad concept of modesty and respectability, embarrassment in the (potential) presence of men

shei*kh*. Shiite religious scholar

shermātī. modest, shy or reserved; adjective deriving from the noun *sharm* (modesty)

Shia. Islamic denomination accepting Ali as Prophet Muhammad's successor; today significantly influenced by religious scholars in Iran and Iraq

sunna. emulation of Prophet Muhammad's teachings or practices that were transmitted orally; after the Qur'an most important source for Islamic theology

Sunni. the largest Islamic denomination worldwide, characterized by a relatively decentralized structure

ta'vīz. amulet imbued with supernatural powers by a religious authority or shaman; generally perceived to be protective, but can also be misused for black magic

ṭalāq. divorce

zehen. mind

zinā. sexual intercourse outside of marriage

NOTES

CHAPTER 1 POLITICS OF THE SENSIBLE

1. Music by Jabir Khan, D. W. Baig and Haroon Sharoon, lyrics by Zafar Waqar Taj; singers are Salman Paras and an anonymous woman; released in February 2014, https://soundcloud.com/d-w-baig/morek-thay-nay.
2. From the 2017 national census, statistics for Gilgit-Baltistan have not been published; I received the official numbers from government sources.
3. The emphasis on constructivism has left the question of emotions' universal existence unresolved. Advocating humans' equality in diversity, psychological anthropologists such as Paul Ekman (1980) and Renato Rosaldo ([1989] 1993), have argued that certain basic emotional faculties are shared worldwide. Based on our somatic abilities, all humans have a similar potential of experiences and feelings; what varies is how they are "emotionalized," or consciously processed and put into words. Emotions take shape in different "colorations and intensities" (Lindholm 2005, 42) based on people's experiences of historically grown, geographically and socially different contexts. Findings from neurosciences support the relativist claim that emotions are not genetically given, but a result of the brain's continuous cognitive (re)wiring in relation to a person's environment (Bull and Mitchell 2015).
4. In the post-deconstruction period, "the turn to affect" gained momentum in anthropology as a "reparative" reaction (Hemmings 2005) to overly abstract discourses. In the introduction to their seminal collection of essays on the affective turn, Melissa Gregg and Gregory Seigworth (2010) characterize affect as "in-between-ness" that connects bodies and agents with each other, describing encounters. Despite this emancipatory potential to dissolve long-standing binaries, scholars of affect take feelings for granted as universal biological sensations, thus are less in need of a strict definition. Emotions, on the other hand, had to be separated from preconscious, impartial affect. Brian Massumi (2002) defines them as a subjective but reflective process of self-awareness.
5. By describing these processes as *Friction* (2005), anthropologist Anna Tsing elegantly draws our attention to negotiations that are involved in changing scenarios. She provocatively summarizes: "Disturbance is always in the middle of things: the term does not refer us to a harmonious state before disturbance. Disturbances follow other disturbances. Thus, [. . .] disturbance is ordinary." (2015, 160) Similar to the Foucauldian conception of power as diffusely dispersed and negotiated among agents, norms, ideas, and feelings are constituted in the moment of interactions and relationships. When "each meeting matters" (Barad 2007, 353), the world is never in stasis but always "in-the-becoming" (Ingold 2011, 9).

6. To pacify local politicians, the Pakistani government issued a new order in 2018, dissolving the Gilgit-Baltistan Council and re-allocating powers to the Assembly. The local government in Gilgit-Baltistan now resembles the government of other provinces, yet with a strong link to Islamabad.
7. Livia Holden, who served as Dean of the Humanities and Social Sciences Faculty at Gilgit's Karakoram International University (KIU), edited a special issue of *South Asian History and Culture on Law, Governance, and Culture in Gilgit-Baltistan* (2019) that combined the work of local and international scholars with independent researchers from the NGO sector. Recent social science on the area includes books by Pakistani academics, such as Ali's *Delusional States* (2019), Shafqat Hussain's (2015) historical analysis of Hunza's remoteness, and Hasan Karrar's (2009) work on the new Chinese silk road, as well as scholars who originate from Gilgit-Baltistan and work on pressing political topics like Safiullah Baig (2013) on tourism, Muhammad Feyyaz (2019) on geopolitics and the region's multicultural society, and Izhar Hunzai (2013), Mehfooz Ullah, and Zaigham Ali (2019) on sectarianism in Gilgit.
8. As the Islamic studies scholar Andreas Rieck (1997) observed, "even up to the 20th century, Islamization has not been completely successful in overshadowing pre-Islamic beliefs and traditions" (219). The importance of a people's ethnic ancestry therefore cannot be denied.
9. Two rich exceptions are Are Knudsen (2009) and Magnus Marsden (2007a) who engage with men's emotions in areas adjacent to Gilgit-Baltistan in Khyber Pakhtunkwa.
10. In his famous book on the *Transformation of Intimacy* (1992), Anthony Giddens dissects the emergence of romantic love and captures historical developments, such as the liberation of sexuality from reproduction as a form of democratization for women. Similar to Gidden's observations for a 'modern' society, the sociologist Zygmunt Bauman follows a quasi-evolutionary model of unilinear development from social regulations toward free choice. His book *Liquid Love* (2003) describes the increasing fragility and unpredictability of relationships in an individualized, globalized, and consumerist lifestyle full of infinite possibilities.
11. Emotional pluralism lies at the heart of Francesca Orsini's edited volume, *Love in South Asia* (2006), and in a special issue of *The History of Emotions in Urban South Asia* (2017) edited by Elizabeth Chatterjee, Sneha Krishnan, and Megan Robb. Many of the contributions feature historical analyses that heavily rely on textual sources that reinforce normative and reflective views on love and emotions in ways that social and cultural anthropology try to avoid.
12. Moreover, pseudonyms stand in for personal names; to ensure the anonymity of my interlocutors, professions and kinship degrees might be changed.
13. This fit in well with my intention to keep a low profile for Pakistan's secret services, which have gravely obstructed some of my women colleagues' research in the area (Ali 2019; Grieser 2018).
14. Grappling with the bloodless' technical jargon and objectifying tendencies of academic writing, scholars of emotions experience the challenge to live up to feelings' viscerality and recommend the adoption of a poetic or prosaic language to provide a more sensuous translation of local concepts (Beatty 2019; Chatterjee, Krishnan, and Robb 2017; Stoller 1997; Wynn 2015).
15. It is to challenge such stereotypes that Kirmani (2013), in her ethnography of Muslim women in a Delhi neighborhood, presents a range of singular narrative accounts that stress the multiplicity of existing views and give credit to ongoing negotiations

around women's agency. Many recent ethnographies on and by Pakistani women also strive to describe alternative life trajectories, with research focused specifically on women from the upper-middle classes (Haeri 2002; Ahmad 2009; Ahmed 2006), women in urban contexts (Jamal 2013; Ring 2006), and working women (Jafree 2017; Mirza 2002).

16. Verses Sahih Bukhari 3:34:421 and 3:49:860.

17. As early as 1949, political and religious leaders accused the autonomous *All Pakistani Women's Association* (APWA) with betraying the nationalist ideology and promoting an un-Islamic, external agenda (Charania 2014).

18. Ayesha Khan (2018) further discusses the intersections of Pakistani politics, global politics, and Islamist radicalizations in her book on the women's movement in Pakistan.

19. In Muslim history writing, a popular narrative exists about Islam's liberating spirit at the time of its introduction. A prominent example is veiling that already existed in pre-Islamic Arabia and was practiced by upper class women to preserve their sexuality for one man, while working women and slaves walked bare breasted and were more vulnerable to men's violations (Ahmed 1992). Islam then allowed all women to cover themselves, implying a great egalitarian spirit and liberating women from being at men's mercy. These accounts have served religious scholars as publicity for their generous paternalism and distraction from clearly masculine interpretations of the Qur'an (Zaki 2016).

20. Srila Roy in *New South Asian Feminisms* (2012), as well as Ania Loomba and Ritty Lukose in *South Asian Feminisms* (2012), offer comprehensive overviews of contemporary feminism in South Asia. While historical studies focused on the subcontinent's colonial legacy and later nationalist politics, both of which considerably objectified women, new work has explored sexuality, queer studies, and the lives of sex workers and subalterns, as well as related health issues. The majority of works on sexualities or queer studies in South Asia have a strong Hindu orientation and elaborate on political implications, from legal issues over state programs to national identities. Topics such as the sanctity of the marital bond, an ascetic anxiety about semen loss, or LGBT activism differ considerably in the Islamic State of Pakistan. Although the third gender is also legally acknowledged in Pakistan, transgenderism or associated practices do not play a role in Gilgit-Baltistan.

21. To trouble the narrative that emotionality is disciplined by the rational, modern mode of being, Pernau (2019) outlines developments "from balance to fervor" for public politics in Muslim colonial India. While I cannot relate this acceptance of emotionality for the women's sphere, at least the existence and efficacy of emotions seems to be widely acknowledged by scholars, politicians, and ordinary people alike. In her work on the consumption of Islamic goods among the urban middle classes in the Pakistani metropolis of Lahore, Ammara Maqsood (2017) has found that "modernity" is strongly linked to neoliberal market practices. Countering the perceived hegemony of Western values, economic success is combined with a stress on logical, religious thinking. Both elements target the stereotypes of "backward" Muslims.

CHAPTER 2 EMBODYING MODEST RESERVE

1. Butler develops her arguments on the basis of Althusser's theory of interpellation ([1972] 2001).

2. These observations stand in contrast to, as well as resonate with, Mahmood's (2005) findings from Egyptian women in the piety movement who consciously teach themselves an inner state of shyness by engaging with outer practices of Islamic modesty, such as adapting a veil to synchronize the discrepancy of outer behavior and inner moral motives and desires. While the direction of self-discipline differs from Gilgiti women's intentions, the analytical outcome strongly resonates with mine: "[A]ction does not issue forth from natural feelings but *creates* them," while at the same time, "it is through repeated bodily acts that one trains one's memory, desire, and intellect" (Mahmood 2012, 383–4, emphasis in original).
3. For a comparable discourse on the Muslim concept of the *sharif* (noble) person with similar implications but more prevalence in mainstream Pakistan or Muslim India than in Gilgit-Baltistan see Khoja-Moolji (2018) and Minault (1986).
4. *Sharminda* was misleadingly translated as "modest" by Jeffrey in her ethnography on Muslim women in Delhi (1979, 99).
5. Related terms that are rarely used in the area of Gilgit include *sharmīlī* (shy), *shermāna* (to blush), *sharmsārī* (ashamed, embarrassed), and *sharminda* (ashamed).
6. Data from the author's mobile phone census of 683 people living in 121 households; differences between rural and urban environments were minor.
7. Throughout South Asia, female quarters are often called *zenāna*; the term is, however, not very common in the area of Gilgit.
8. The phrase "what your right hand possesses" refers to the existence of slavery in Prophet Muhammad's time. The commodification of humans has not been given sufficient recognition as an influence on Islamic ethics, nor in regard to the status of women, but it might have had a basic structuring influence on Muslim societies (Ali 2006).
9. Given that Islamic piety builds on rationality and constraint, men fear their own weakness to seduction. As Mernissi put it, "The woman is *fitna*, the epitome of the uncontrollable, a living representative of the dangers of sexuality and its rampant disruptive potential" (Mernissi [1975] 1987, 44).
10. In the wake of sectarian tensions in the area of Gilgit, both Sunni and Shia radicalized their practice of faith and embraced *fatwas* (directives) by religious authorities that cast music and dancing as mundane pleasures whose inherent association with sexuality distracts believers from the right path. Thereafter public celebrations, such as weddings or shamanic séances, fell silent and were shifted into more secluded realms. Musicians and dancing are now more formally cultivated at polo matches, political functions, or public concerts, all mostly men-only domains.
11. In the 1950s and '60s, research on the Mediterranean (Peristiany 1965), as well as on Muslim communities (Barth [1956] 1990; Bourdieu 1965), greatly focused on "shame and honor" and described them as complementary aspects of gendered role models to maintain a relatively egalitarian male social order. Only works by women anthropologists (Abu-Lughod 1986; Dubisch 1995; Wikan 1984) later argued for a more complex understanding of women's active contribution to family reputation and their self-perception to "have" honor, even if it might be phrased in different terms.
12. Following her long-term study and engagement as a journalist and as a politician, the anthropologist Shah (2017) explored the practice of honor killings and blood feuds (*karo-kari*) in Upper Sindh. Her findings suggest that hurt honor often acts as a mask for other socio-economic or political conflicts, as an instrument to get rid of disagreeable women, harm enemies, or demand money from a perpetrator's side.

13. The term "digital leash" was first coined by Rich Ling in 1999 (as noted in Nafus & Tracey 2002). For more on the conflation of various versions of one's self through mobile communication and digital media, see Walter forthcoming.

CHAPTER 3 ARRANGING AFFECTION

1. Azam Chaudhary (2009) finds drastic words for the Pakistani Punjab: If parents fail the task of finding appropriate partners for their children, they "will not be considered to have led a successful life at the time of their death" (22).
2. Mothers, many of whom were illiterate in the 1990s, did not often keep exact birth records and use other reference points to remember their children's births, such as "before the 1988 attacks" or "after we built the new house"; consequently, time underlies flexible interpretation, so a girl who looks very young is treated as a child longer than one who matures earlier—independent of their ages. Even today, births are often not recorded and young adults only register their existence and date of birth when applying for an ID card or other official documents; incongruence with school certificates is very common and parents make their children as young as possible to give them more time for their studies and to get into age-restricted government jobs later on.
3. Despite repeated attempts, I never managed to acquire one of these books; my male friends might have been too shy to hand over such material to me, or exaggerated its prevalence. I had to resort to more official sources, such as Al-Sistani's advice manuals and *fatwas* (religious directives) that go into detail about the different natures of female menstrual blood or ablution rituals after ejaculation, but do not ponder on relationship matters (Al-Sistani 2017).
4. A qualitative study on sexuality in rural and urban areas of Bangladesh (Khan at al. 2002) showed that almost half of the men have had sexual experiences before marriage, if not intercourse, then kissing or touching a female body. I suspect the numbers in the close-knit community of Gilgit-Baltistan are much lower.
5. While abortions are generally considered prohibited in Islam, there is disagreement on when the life of a fetus begins. Based on different Qur'anic interpretations, an Amendment to the *Pakistani Penal Code* in 1997 lifted punishment for abortion in the early period of pregnancy. In case of health risks to the mother, doctors can intervene before the child's organs have formed, which means before about eight to twelve weeks of pregnancy (Patel 2003, 189–193). Varley (2008) reports from her fieldwork that local midwives called this stage the "quickening" (283), describing when a mother can feel the embryo. Although newer ultrasound technology shows the heartbeat even earlier, the existence of such varying perspectives leaves room for interpretation.
6. In most Sunni interpretations, custody lies with the mother until children are seven years old, whereas according to Shiite law this only applies until a girl is seven and a boy just two. Because the Qur'an and *sunna* do not directly regulate matters of custody, Pakistani courts make decisions based on a combination of social norms, Islamic interpretations, and legal colonial remnants for "the welfare of the minor" (Rafiq 2014, 272).
7. Verbal triple *ṭalāq*, while acceptable in most Sunni schools of thought, is not a valid means of divorce among Shias, who formulate a *ṭalāq nāma* to dissolve the written *nikāḥ* contract and require two male witnesses (Patel 2003). In Gilgit-Baltistan,

government-authorized *sheikhs* (religious scholars) officially register, thereby legalize, a marriage or divorce.

8. After years of being under British, Kashmiri, and Pakistani administration, residents of Gilgit-Baltistan have become somewhat suspicious of institutionalized law. Instead of providing a sense of security, court proceedings are perceived as being manipulated by personal contacts and as threatening to consume large sums of time and money (Grieser 2018; Lentz 2000).
9. An earlier version of this story has been published in the Pakistani journal *Scrutiny* (Walter 2018).
10. After the Norwegian company Telenor erected the first cell phone tower in Gilgit city in 2006, signal coverage gradually spread all over the region until even relatively remote valleys had been connected by late 2016. In the same year, six network operators were active in Gilgit-Baltistan: Telenor, Zong, SCOM, Ufone, Mobilink, and Warid, although the last three were only present in significantly smaller numbers, as my own mobile phone survey showed. Reflecting the region's disputed status, SCOM is the mobile phone branch of the military-controlled Special Communications Organization (SCO) that has always been the sole provider of landline connections in the region. Thus far, only SCOM caters to remote valleys, providing them with their first—and usually only—means of telecommunications.

CHAPTER 4 FEARING PASSION

1. I translate this kind of love with "passion," which reflects the ordeal and passivity that its Latin root of "suffering" implies.
2. Gratz (2006) also mentions a Gilgiti version of the Laila-Majnun tale, Yurmass and Malang, but none of my interlocutors ever referred to it.
3. Because the language of Shina does not have a written tradition, the Shina Language and Culture Promotion Society uses a complicated transliteration in its books and draws on additional letters added to the Urdu alphabet to reproduce local sounds.
4. In his detailed descriptions of the geography and people of the *Jummoo and Kashmir Territories* (1875), geologist Frederic Drew already identified polo as the national game of the areas that are now Gilgit-Baltistan, where it was played before the arrival of British agents.
5. The word used in the Urdu version of the fairy tale was *moḥabbat*; the original Shina refers to *cīnmus*, a term nowadays outdated in colloquial language.
6. "Milk kinship" resembles a form of adoption or fosterage that has a long tradition in Gilgit-Baltistan: Royal families frequently gave their sons to other ruling dynasties in their infancy to minimize bloodshed over succession within the family, as well as to create alliances (Parkes 2001). Fostering another child, especially in the most intimate way by sharing a mother's milk, creates lifelong relationships that turn children into *nā meḥram* family members that one cannot marry, but can interact without seclusion (Parkes 2005). While the customary ritual to become a *unīlo* or *unīli* (Shina for male or female milk child) was to touch the mother of the family's breast with one's lips to symbolize the nursing relationship, today fictive kinship relations are more flexibly made between adults to overcome *parda* restrictions within the household, for example, when taking in an outsider as a driver, or an anthropologist like myself.

7. Film directed by Mohit Suri; music was composed and written by Mithoon, the singer is Arijit Singh, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Umqb9KENgmk.
8. Since the intensification of the Indian-Pakistani conflict over Kashmir in the summer of 2019, many Indian channels have been banned in Pakistan, and new viewership dynamics need to be explored.
9. Many of the remote valleys in Gilgit-Baltistan are only served by the SCOM mobile network. As a result, most of the inhabitants of these valleys bought their SIM cards at the time when their valley was first connected, and their phone numbers are often consecutive numbers. By dialing the same first four or five digits as their own, boys have high chances of reaching someone within the same language community.
10. Kashrot is an inner-city, Sunni neighborhood of Gilgit.
11. Although small variations exist in the stories and practices of shamans from valley to valley, some commonalities are prevalent in most accounts (Csáji 2011, Jettmar 1975, Marhoffer-Wolff 2002, Sidky 1994, Snoy 1975): The person is chosen to be a shaman by the fairies, and her or his family subsequently identifies abnormal behavior, such as repeatedly falling unconscious, as being "fairy or shaman sickness." To cure the mostly young adult of her illness, she is initiated by an older shaman in public rituals and is taught to use her connection to the fairies and channel her spiritual powers. Instruments, especially drums, play an important role in calling the fairies; the shaman dances and inhales the smoke of the juniper tree, which grows high up on the mountains, to stimulate hallucinations and travel to the fairies' sphere in a trance. At the end of the initiation ceremony, the shaman drinks goat blood, which tastes as sweet and pure as milk for the fairies—another inversion of the norms of the human world where blood is *ḥarām* (forbidden) in Islam.

CHAPTER 5 ROMANCING MARRIAGE

1. Her school certificates displayed a later date of birth and she tended to identify herself as being in her early twenties, but her mother reckoned that two of Roqiya's younger siblings were already around twenty years old. As births are often not officially recorded and many children only registered once they start school, stating a later birth date is common practice in Gilgit-Baltistan to extend the time period before a person outgrows age limits for stipends, university quotas, or government jobs.
2. Spellings in the SMS conversation are left in the original; they demonstrate the informal, private character of the conversation. Both partners are educated up to college level and capable of conversing and writing in impeccable Urdu. In Gilgit, mobile phone users typically resort to the local language Shina, the national language Urdu, and a few words of English, abbreviating and transliterating them into English letters.
3. Tarang advert directed by Samir Tewari (Adcom Agency), produced by Faisal Hashmi and Sultan Ghani Afzal (Stimulus Productions). A later version of the clip is available on YouTube, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=68CkTkncMHc.

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