

**Pakistan's Cultural Identity in the Era of Netflix:
Perspectives of EMU's Pakistani Students**

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ABSTRACT

This research is a qualitative, exploratory study that aims to understand the cultural identity of the Pakistani young adults in relation to Netflix. With a lack of youth centric local media available for Pakistani young adults, it is common for them to be exposed to adult oriented local and international content, both influencing, along with various political and social factors explored in the literature, the cultural identity that they develop.

The sample population for this study consists of 15 Pakistani nationals studying at the Eastern Mediterranean University (EMU) who are undergraduates, users of Netflix, and aged between 18-25 years. I conducted semi-structured interviews and made use of the textual analysis methodology to analyze the information collected.

There were three main research questions driving the study: how young Pakistani adults view the culture of Pakistan and subsequently their identity, how they navigate their way around the lack of youth centric content, and whether Netflix aids their identity formation, if at all, in a manner contrary to Pakistan's cultural values.

Findings show that the participants view their culture and cultural identity in terms of Islam but want to change the conservative air surrounding it, previously preferred third party websites and now Netflix to consume international content, and feel that Netflix has had no impact on their values, although it somewhat influences them in general.

This study contributes to the dearth of literature regarding Pakistani identity and Netflix's relationship with identity and benefits government and media personnel,

academicians and students, media scholars, psychologists, sociologists, the Netflix team and more.

Keywords: Pakistan, Cultural Identity, Netflix, Westernization

ÖZ

Bu araştırma, niteliksel ve deneysel yöntemler kullanılarak Pakistan uyruklu genç neslin kültürel kimliklerini Netflix ilişkisi üzerinden araştırmayı hedeflemektedir. Yerel/ulusal medyanın genç odaklı olmaması yüzünden Pakistanlı genç nesillerin kültürel kimliklerini geliştirmelerinde, gerek literatürde incelenen çeşitli politik ve sosyal faktörlerin, gerekse de kültürel kimliği etkileyen yetişkinlere yönelik ulusal ve uluslararası içeriklere maruz kalmalarının etkili olduğu söylenebilir.

Bu çalışmada yaşları 18 ile 25 arasında değişen ve Netflix kullanan Pakistan uyruklu 15 Doğu Akdeniz Üniversitesi öğrencisinin görüşlerine başvurulmuştur. Öğrencilerden toplanan bilgiler yarı-yapılandırılmış görüşmeler aracılığıyla toplanmış ve bu metinler tematik bir yaklaşımla çözümlenmeye tabi tutulmuştur.

Çalışmayı üç ana araştırma sorusu yönlendirmektedir. Birinci soru, Pakistanlı genç neslin, uluslararası dizi ve filmleri yerel dizilere tercih edip etmedikleridir. İkincisi Netflix'i Pakistan'ın yerel eğlence kanallarına tercih edip etmedikleridir. Üçüncü soru ise, Netflix'in Pakistan'ın inkâr edilen kültürel değerlerine aykırı bir kimlik oluşumuna destek olup olmadığı sorusudur.

Ortaya çıkan bazı eğilimler, Netflix konusunda filizlenen bir popüleriteyi ortaya çıkarmakta, Batı medyasının artan etkisi, teknolojik bireysellik lehine parçalanmış kuşaksal kolektiflik, muhafazakarlığın yerine ılımlı bir din anlayışının ihtiyacı, Pakistan kültürünün uluslararası kültürler tarafından daha da kuşatılması, Pakistan genç neslinin değişim ihtiyaçları karşısında bir dürtü olmaktadır.

Bu alıřma, Pakistan kimliđi ve Netflix'in kimlik iliřkisi zerinden ilgili literatrn eksikliđine katkıda bulunmakta, hkmet, medya mensupları, akademisyenler, psikologlar, sosyologlar, Netflix personelleri gibi daha pek ok alana fayda sađlamaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Pakistan, Kltrel kimlik, Netflix, Batılılařma

DEDICATION

To my mother, who spent her days and nights cheering me up when I was tired to the bone. You're my strength, my reason to exist. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to study in this wonderful university and explore what lay beyond Pakistan. I hope this thesis reminds you that though I may be far away, my heart lies with you and the country we love.

To my mirror, Saqib, for his constant support through all the ups and downs. You and I, we're travelers in time, destined to meet over and over again.

To Asma and company, members of my soul tribe who dragged me away from the computer to remind me that there was a life beyond that of reading, writing, and panicking. Our late night walks and soulful discussions got me through some very tough stages and I am truly thankful for those beautiful times.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	iii
ÖZ	v
DEDICATION	vii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT	viii
1 INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 Background of the Study	3
1.1.1 A Brief History of the Pakistani Media	5
1.1.2 New Media in Pakistan: Internet and Netflix	8
1.1.3 From Television to Netflix	11
1.2 Motivation of the Study	15
1.3 Problem of the Study	15
1.4 Research Questions	16
1.5 Significance of the Study	16
1.6 Limitations of the Study	17
2 FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE	18
2.1 Exploring Culture	18
2.2 Exploring Identity	21
2.3 A Colonial Legacy: Identity Crisis From The Root To Now	25
2.4 Contemporary Media Practices and The Rise of Netflix	35
3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY	49
3.1 Research Design	49
3.2 Sample Selection	50
3.3 Data Collection Method and Tools	52

4 ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION	53
4.1 Religion and Culture	53
4.2 Prevalence of Patriarchy	57
4.3 Shifting from Collectivism to Individuality	60
4.4 Conservative to Modern: From Villages to Cities, Diaspora to the Land	63
4.5 Westernization of the Youth	65
4.6 Favoring International Media	67
4.7 Netflix as a Lifestyle	69
4.8 Netflix and Cultural Disconnect	72
4.9 Summary of the Discussion	76
5 CONCLUSION	79
REFERENCES	88
APPENDICES	107
Appendix A: Interview Questionnaire	108
Appendix B: Participant Information Table	109
Appendix C: Sample Consent Form	110

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

It was a relatively small television (TV); a little black box with moving pictures, definitely incomparable to the 75 inches, LED displays found in most homes today. USB and HDMI ports did not exist but what did exist were color bars and static; basically a classic 90's TV viewing situation. Little did anyone view this device as more than just a source of infotainment. As a child, I remember the channels being switched between Cartoon Network (a popular kids' channel then a division of the Hanna-Barbera Cartoons), HBO (Home Box Office- an American company and TV channel offering original programming and movie broadcasting) (Gregersen, 2012) and Star Plus (a prized Indian family drama, comedy and crime show producing channel owned by the popular Star Network) (Media, Star Plus, n.d.), three foreign channels; the former was my personal favorite, the second my aunt's and third my grandmother's. My grandmother was as possessive about the remote as she was about the kitchen, the most significant domain in the house, and so we mostly ended up watching Indian shows despite having different preferences.

As I recall instances and piece together the bigger picture, it occurs to me that I hardly remember watching Pakistani television shows. We did sometimes watch Pakistan Television (PTV), a state owned channel, but only to keep ourselves updated with the news. On a personal level, it now makes sense; my grandmother was twelve when she immigrated from the Indian side of the subcontinent to the Pakistani side after the

subcontinental partition of 1947. I once asked her what she remembered of that time and she said it wasn't much, and though childhood memories may fade away at the surface they remain in the background, rooted in our subconscious. It's easier to understand my aunt's fascination with HBO; my aunt was the first in the house to switch to jeans and tee shirts compared with the staple *Shalwar Kameez* (Pakistan's national dress which consists of loose pajama-like trousers and a long tunic) not to mention how she had the latest chart topping American songs blaring from her CD player- a true depiction of the early 2000's but I do have vague memories of listening to Backstreet Boys on her cassette player when I was even younger. She was a fan of Baywatch and had Tom Cruise's posters pinned up in the room, much to the chagrin of my grandmother. This vintage nostalgia is endearing until one realizes how lacking it is in Pakistani content. It seemed that the only day my household favored listening to Pakistani songs was around national holidays, an ephemeral sense of nationalism evoked amid the general chaos of what being Pakistani truly is.

It was more of the same at school, where my friends and I would huddle together and discuss the latest episode of popular Indian TV serials, almost all of which centered around family politics and upon retrospect were unsuitable to be watched by children or even teenagers but with a lack of family oriented TV shows nationally and especially youth centric/ coming of age ones for the teen community, there wasn't much of a choice. When Indian TV channels were made open to the public, they were like a breath of fresh air. Everyone's mother, aunt or grandmother was enthralled by the fancy sets, the drama, and the complicated if sometimes unrealistic storylines from across the border. In the meantime, Pakistani TV shows were few and far between, low budget and focusing on providing more realistic and sobered content that found it

hard to rival its over-the-top Indian counterparts. There were fewer kids engaging in western content beyond cartoons but the number slowly began to grow in my teenage years. The same way, more channels appeared on the scene offering more of the same like AXN (Action Xtreme Network) (an American TV channel offering top rated dramas and movies, reality shows and original programming), Warner Bros (an American TV channel showing the Warner Brothers' Studio hits and TV shows) (Britannica, Warner Brothers, 1998), Colors (another Indian channel offering drama serials, reality TV shows and movies) (Media, Colors, n.d.) and Urdu 1 (the first Pakistani channel to broadcast Turkish and Spanish shows dubbed in Urdu) appeared on the scene, and the cable system provided a number of other options to choose from, effectively increasing competition for the Pakistani TV industry that was only slowly and steadily gaining ground. With more international channels than national ones to choose from, along with various other factors outside the scope of this thesis, we as Pakistanis fell further into the identity crisis we have been facing since the birth of the nation in terms of our identity, culture and sense of belonging.

1.1 Background of the Study

In a Gallup Survey conducted on the identity crisis faced by the youth of Pakistan, 53% agreed that the reason was increasing globalization (Pakistan G. , 2013). With a country whose history is steeped into colonization and imperial warfare, reducing the lack of identity to globalization is not just erroneous but exceptionally essential. In order to understand the root of the problem, it is important to turn the wheel of time and pay the pre-partitioned subcontinent a visit. When Pakistan first came into being, debate about its ideological foregrounding raged on; for the founder, Muhammad Ali Jinnah, the new state centered around the idea of a Muslim majority state, for others it was about building an "Islamic" state (Paracha, 2015).

Although intended as a cultural string to pull together the various Muslim sects and factions spread across the sub-continent, Islam was not to be used for more than a mere symbolism for the idea of a separate Muslim homeland (Pande, 2011) (Paracha, 2015). For the Muslims who did travel to the new country, there were millions who chose to stay put in India instead (Ashraf, 2017).

Understanding the subsequent multicultural environment that was to be the future of the nation, Islam was taken no further when Jinnah, in his inaugural speech, mentioned that the faith of the members of the state and the state itself were to be separate (Jinnah, 1947) and yet, that did not come to fruition as religion was used time and time again as an umbrella term under which to gather support from all the diverse majority groups that only had one thing in common: faith.

It often does not go unnoticed throughout history that the founder of Pakistan belonged to the subcontinental elite, studied in Britain, complied with Western values, so to speak, and often communicated in English; his first address to the nation after it has been successfully partitioned was also delivered in English. On the day of the partition, this was the first sign of the imminent chaos; the second came when Urdu was made the official language of Pakistan despite being spoken by a minority simply because it was closer to the Arabic script, and Arabic is the language in which the Islamic scriptures were compiled.

There are various other quotable examples, but what they all boil down to is one simple fact: the cultural identity of Pakistan is rooted in its origins; it's origins are rooted in Islamic symbolism, separation from the Hindu majority state of India, and freedom

from the British Raj that took power from the Muslims who had ruled the subcontinent for decades.

1.1.1 A Brief History of Media in Pakistan

Among the turmoil and zigzagging political milestones and tragedies covered in Pakistan's history textbooks, references to pre-partition media are little and mentioned only as a gateway to more pressing topics. Newspapers and books receive most of the attention but what is little known is the presence of films. Colonial films, created by British filmmakers and film enthusiasts, had a space of their own, mostly centered around educating the illiterate masses (so to speak from a privileged colonial position) and conducting propaganda for economic benefits, both of which favored the British ruling class (Burns, 2013). As more local movies made by local filmmakers began to gain popularity, Bombay (now Mumbai) and Lahore became the centers of media activity, the latter suffering worse than the former in terms of technicalities, talents and most importantly, infrastructure; one of the first things to happen post-partition was the two main film studios of Lahore being razed to the ground in the midst of communal fires (Bali, 2016).

In a similar crippling fashion, when West Pakistan (now Islamic Republic of Pakistan) partitioned from East Pakistan (now People's Republic of Bangladesh) due to the ideological, political, and ethnic divides, the industry suffered once more due to the loss of market, talent and expertise that Dacca (now Dhaka) had contributed to the industry's golden era of the 1960s (Ahmad A. N., 2016). This stems from the fact that most of the popular films (a majority of which were made in Urdu, not Bengali) were produced in East Pakistan since there was a large audience for Urdu movies in both places, a fact that is not readily acknowledged due to Bangladesh's nationalist

tendencies and there is little that can be traced of Urdu movies in Bangladesh's cinematic history because of government interference in record keeping (Hoek, 2014).

It was in this Golden Age of the 60s that Pakistan's first TV Station, PTV (Pakistan Television Network) also aired its broadcast (Naveed, 2011). The channel was a collaborative venture between a Pakistani industrialist, Japan's Nippon Electric Company and UK's Thomas Television International and thus a private channel which was later nationalized in 1971. The channel became popular by developing TV serials in various genres like somber family dramas, stories of love and romance, and socially driven satirical commentaries (Shahzada, 2020). Not much later another channel by the name of STN (Shalimar Television Network) came along in 1988, commencing with Cable News Network (CNN)'s broadcast and participating in the production of similarly culturally relevant shows (Siddiqui, 2015). Both channels have been home to leading TV dramas focused on social issues like *Khuda Ki Basti* (1969) (translation: God's Abode) and *Tanhiayyan* (1985) (translation: Solitudes) and comedic content like *Ainak Waala Jin* (1985) (translation: The Bespectacled Ghost) (Ahmad B. , 2015). These came in complete contrast with the movies being churned out in the 80s most of whom were low budget and targeted towards the male, poor and illiterate sections of the society; the most popular among them were Punjabi and Pushto action films where rape was a recurring trope (Khan & Ahmad, 2010).

To add fuel to the fire, while the 70s saw over 100 movies being released annually, making the industry one of the largest in the world and the Muslim world collectively, and 220 registered film distributors distributing the movies in 1300 cinemas, the military dictatorship of the 80s saw an intense wave of Islamization and censorship

prevailed with cinemas either closed, destroyed, or converted into car parks and shopping malls (Khan, 2015).

It was not until the early 2000s that the media of Pakistan saw any significant changes or even hope. In an interesting plot twist, it was another military dictator who tried to undo the damage caused by the first, Zia-Ul-Haq in the 80s, and so under the presidency of the new military dictator, Pervez Musharraf, the media was privatized and a new era of media policies and practices was ushered in, going from three state owned channels to almost 90 (Gul & Ali, 2017). In its frenzied state, the media explored its options with Indian shows beginning to be aired in Pakistani households, receiving major support while their Pakistani counterparts struggled to compete (IANS, 2010).

In 2012 Turkish shows followed in their footsteps and Indian shows fell out of favor, ultimately getting banned in 2016 (News D. , Pakistan's Supreme Court reinstates ban on airing Indian films, shows on local TV channels, 2018). On the contrary, the exact opposite seemed to be happening across the border when in 2014 Pakistani TV series began to be aired by *Zindagi* TV (translation: Life TV), an Indian channel that realized the demand for Pakistani shows that people were getting pirated recordings of (Boone & Jain, 2014) out of curiosity and also because Pakistani shows were generally considered to be better than local shows there. Similarly, Pakistani TV dramas also garnered interest from Bangladesh, formerly a part of Pakistan, but both India and Bangladesh face airing problems when tensions between them and Pakistan arise (Desk W. , Bangladesh cable operators seek ban on Pakistani TV channels, 2013) (Desk E. , 2016). Pakistani shows have also left their mark in other countries like Nepal (Pakistan A. P., 2017) and outside of the subcontinent, the shows seem to be popular

among expatriates who wish to connect with their language, culture and country; the 2018 Hum Awards Show (an award show conducted by the popular Pakistani entertainment channel *Hum*- translation: Us) held in Canada proved it with audiences crowding for pictures and conversations with the Pakistani TV stars (Roy, 2018).

With 2007's low budget hit *Khuda Kay Liye* (translation: For God's Sake) which explored the effects of radicalization on a Pakistani family, set of course in the backdrop of Pakistan's war against the Taliban (a militant political Islamist group). The movie was essential in kick-starting a new wave of mainstream Urdu films which had drastically fallen in peril while regional cinema flourished (Shackle, 2018). Over the next decade many films with genres encompassing drama, action, romance, and comedy surfaced, some copying their Indian neighbor's over the top style, some sticking to the distinct low budget artsy style and the Pakistani film industry one again began to breathe.

Pakistani movies and TV shows both have had major breakthroughs with overseas Pakistani and international audience, the former wishing to keep in touch with the culture of the country and the latter in hopes of understanding the culture. While difficult at the start because of the way Pakistani shows were streamed on free websites such as Vimeo or YouTube, today's world of legal, subscription based websites like Netflix may just change the game.

1.1.2 New Media in Pakistan: Internet and Netflix

In times of Wi-Fi and hotspots, dial up connections and the less than appealing sound of the telephone connecting with the internet is a 90's specialty that is since long forgotten. In fact, many young Pakistani undergraduates don't even know of a time before a readily available internet connection!

Internet came to Pakistan in 1993, providing dial-up connections and email facilities in aid of educational and other important areas of service (News D. , Technology: Evolution of the internet in Pakistan, 2010). I remember accompanying my uncle to the offices of various internet service providers (ISPs) to buy a certain number of hours which later became more convenient with their release of coded scratch cards. Despite the change in the payment method, the dial-up connections remained the same and users relied on their landline numbers to connect with the internet. Although connectivity progressed to broadband internet (1995) and later fiber optics (2000) (News D. , Technology: Evolution of the internet in Pakistan, 2010), dial up connections were still in use for a long time; even I was using it until 2008 before my aunt suggested switching to Wi-Fi.

It was around the time fiber optics were introduced that my aunt started downloading movies and bringing them home on Compact Discs (CDs) and Digital Video Discs (DVDs) for the family to watch. They were almost always English, sometimes Indian too, and sometimes we alternated between downloading (which was basically free but with a high risk of viruses) or going to DVD selling shops. Pakistan, much like other countries, is no stranger to piracy and has had companies operating illegally, setting up businesses in unassuming, covert locations with warehouses full of DVDs and CDs containing softwares, games, and especially movies and TV shows (Abdurab, 2018). With international film distributors not operating in Pakistan, piracy, although illegal, has been a big business but it is now dying out due to the easy availability of materials on the internet (Hasan M. , 2017). Watching television shows online from streaming sites or downloading them from torrent sites like Pirate Bay have made Pakistan a member of the US Watch List for Global Piracy Hubs (Sanchez, 2019). With the

advent of streaming sites like Netflix, piracy has been on a decline worldwide, but what will happen in Pakistan is a question still to be explored.

From a simple email and web browsing experience, the advent of the internet saw a number of important advancements. In terms of audio-visual content, the next thing to make it big was Netflix, a streaming service offering an ad free viewing experience that has come to rival television viewing in an unprecedented way; firstly, by being ad free and thus retaining its audience unlike channels that can lose their audience with the switch of a button, and secondly, by providing back-to-back episodic experience, instead of having the audience wait for hours, days or weeks to watch their favorite shows. In addition to that, new content is added every month.

Netflix's content consists of TV shows, movies, and documentaries, both original productions and popular non-Netflix ones. The Netflix experience begins with a free trial after which the user has to pay the required amount (depending on the chosen package) and if not, can cancel without a contract, fee or other means of commitment. The availability of Netflix across all internet supported devices from Smart TVs, Blu-Rays, Gaming Consoles (Xbox, Play Stations etc.), and streaming media players to smartphones and tablets makes it a handier means of entertainment in comparison with a television, and so challenges traditional viewing experiences in a completely new way.

Moreover, with algorithmic measures taken to individualize each viewer's experience, Netflix further parts ways from a traditional broadcasting routine. With its presence in over 190 countries, it provides access to both global and local content but the statistics of said content varies (Center, 2010).

1.1.3 From Television to Netflix

When television came into existence, the possibilities were endless. From scripted to non-scripted texts, anything was possible. Early television dramas were basically like live theatre; they were shot live and members of the cast and the crew needed effort, timing and concentration to get things right, not to mention that the process was meant to be continuous since segmented performances and editing came later (Bignell, 2018).

It's fairly unsurprising that in the beginning, lead roles and important broadcasting positions were shared by white men and women and the color barrier was only broken after the African-American civil rights movements before which there was little to no representation of the community or their problems (Encyclopedia, 2020). Nonetheless TV became popular for being a technological novelty and its importance can be gauged from the fact that not only was it found in elite households, but it was also in possession of those segments of the society that did not have telephones, indoor lavatories or baths, or even fridges since not having TVs meant feeling a sense of social exclusion (Anthony, 2013).

It should be kept in mind that unlike books or newspapers, watching television did not require sound academic or literary background or even the mere ability to read, nor was the audience asked to extend their imagination as was the case with radio; the mere fact that sounds and images were all it took was able to entice the audience into staying tuned. Although early debates about the way TV should format its content, whether like Hollywood films (a feat deemed too expensive for its varying locations, set-ups, and effort) or radio, the latter was chosen for being easy and inexpensive yet film still felt threatened by the medium and the burgeoning opportunity it presented which film studio did later explore and invest in (Thompson, 2009).

The transformative power of TV gradually made it a medium of supremacy with various televisual texts, other than dramas, such as news, fashion shows, sports, documentaries, crime shows, and the variety of other content that we now see making it on air. This has led to television being called a wasteland and considered as addictive as drugs and junk food in popular discourse, with its sense of liveness being what makes TV distinct as a medium despite most of the content being scripted and recorded; this is something that Netflix has tried to emulate with its bingeing format (Tryon, 2015).

Among discourses surrounding television, one of particular popularity regards the medium as being part of the culture industry (a term coined by critical theorists Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer to explain the production and marketing of culture), and used to further corporate capitalism by building dominant, ideological narratives with hidden messages (Bernstein, 2001). Although Adorno believed that this was done in a way that would leave the text unanalyzed and unchallenged, it is safe to say that in the age of the internet everything is under scrutiny and scrutiny, if spoken or written aloud, is largely accessible. With Netflix in the mix, it wouldn't be a stretch to say that although the service is visibly expanding its corporate end in various countries every year it is also openly challenging many of the tropes that haven't changed in the media for a long, long time.

According to Hosch (2009) Netflix started out as a video rental company in 1997 that by 1999 offered its members the choice to select movies and television shows through their website and have them mailed via distribution centers instead of having to walk to rental stores themselves. Members only had to pay a flat monthly fee, but the movies in their possession were limited to their monthly subscription plans, in comparison to

the now unlimited access with subscription plans limited only to the program quality and number of screens available for view. In 2006 Netflix offered a contest centered on the improvement of their algorithms in order to improve viewing experience through recommendations. It was in 2007 that Netflix offered internet based streaming for the first time, revolutionizing viewing experience for members of the digital age. Although Netflix remains a rental company, it has added streaming services and media production to its business model, offering its own audiovisual content that has come to be known as Netflix Originals.

Netflix's top two competitors are Amazon Prime and Hulu respectively (Owler.com, n.d.). In terms of pricing, device support, content, and user experience Netflix has the upper hand compared to Amazon Prime, but the latter being connected to the global online shopping giant Amazon, comes with perks like shopping specials, free music streaming using Amazon Music, and free content like National Football League (NFL)'s Thursday Night Live, and access to a wide variety of cable channels (Cohen, 2019). Hulu is a closer competitor to Netflix in terms of content since it has a similar quality collection of purchased and original content, with the added benefit of live TV coverage, the price is lower with ads and almost similar to the Netflix standard package with ads but a separate fee is charged for Live TV. Hulu also supports the same number of devices as Netflix and is thus more geared towards the Internet TV experience instead of the cinematic experience that Netflix has to offer (Cohen, 2019). In spite of few differences, Netflix having the first mover's advantage is on top of the industry for now.

The only other major competitors are illegal streaming sites and illegal downloading sites that offer no-charge, free streaming of movies and TV shows. Some sites like

Jetflixs and IStreamItAll even offer illegal streaming for a subscription based fee, claiming to offer more content than Netflix, Amazon Prime and Hulu (Haworth, 2019). Despite its competitors Netflix is still growing and building a loyal fan base. In 2016, Netflix expanded the list of its countries to include Pakistan, bringing the budding culture of “global internet TV” closer than ever to fruition (Reuters, Television giant Netflix comes to Pakistan, 2016).

Netflix launched its services in Pakistan in early 2016, along with 129 other countries (Reuters, Television giant Netflix comes to Pakistan, 2016). According to Watson (2019) Pakistan ranks number 8 on the top 10 countries worldwide to have the most available content on Netflix. A number of hit Pakistani TV shows and movies have made it to Netflix (Malik, 2019) and Pakistan’s first Netflix Original series is also in the works (Desk I. , 2018) although no other news about it has been made public for two years now. Google trends and search results have shown a 73% interest in Netflix related searches as well as averaged 150,000 every month since 2018 (Hussain, 2019) and PTCL (Pakistan Telecommunication Company Limited) has been providing its broadband users with gift subscriptions for free Netflix usage for up to 6 months, becoming the first Pakistani company to collaborate with Netflix and receive traction (Pakistan A. N., 2018).

With Netflix making available movies and TV shows from across the world, those from the West, neighboring India, and Turkey, the Muslim brother that Pakistan has long since craved, it is vital to explore the impact of the varying cultures on Pakistan’s own, especially on young adults who are the present and future of the country. It is evident that Netflix is gaining momentum within Pakistan and for a country steeped in

an identity crisis, it is important to address its role in terms of identity formation and shaping which is what this thesis will attempt to answer as intricately as possible.

1.2 Motivation of the Study

Pakistani TV shows are known to contain mature themes and are mostly targeted towards and consumed by adults, especially that of the Generation X. Belonging to a collectivist culture, the youth is exposed to these local shows and international ones that make it to the TV, or those they watch on their internet based devices. Since the Pakistani entertainment industry lacks youth centric content, the market for teenagers and young adults remains unexplored. Consuming content belonging to multiple cultures without a solid cultural foundation of their own is bound to affect the way their identity is formed and shaped. With globalization helping the arrival of Netflix in Pakistan and the increasing use of technological devices by the youth, cultural accessibility is even easier and provides a chance to explore the way media and cultural identity work together.

Few studies have been conducted in this regard with most centering around behavioral aspects and consequences of the content teenagers and young adults consume, but negligible studies have been conducted regarding cultural identity and Netflix, especially in connection with Pakistani youth. This exploratory, qualitative research thus provides original literature and a rich foundation on which to build further researches.

1.3 Problem of the Study

Since the youth is impressionable, it is important to understand their consumption patterns and the impact their practices have on the way they understand the Pakistani culture and themselves.

Keeping in mind the contentious origins of the Pakistani culture, its construction and subsequent representations within various media, competitive cultural practices and values from other countries' content and Netflix's eventual emergence on the scene, it is vital to consider that the Pakistani identity may be further complicated. Thus, this study needs to be conducted to better understand where the youth currently stands.

1.4 Research Questions

Q1. How do Pakistani young adults view the culture of Pakistan, and subsequently their cultural identity?

Q2. How have the Pakistani young adults navigated their way around the lack of youth centric content in terms of movies and TV shows?

Q3. Is Netflix aiding the identity formation, if at all, of Pakistani young adults in a manner that is contrary to Pakistan's cultural values?

1.5 Significance of the Study

Internationally, studies related to Netflix are few and far between with most concerned with Netflix's algorithms, marketing strategies and business models, and a negligible amount has been conducted regarding media and cultural identity in terms of Netflix. Locally, there has been much media related research but mostly political in nature, with very few focusing on the impact of media on the Pakistani youth. This study fills in the gap for all three of those categories in the field of communication both internationally and nationally, providing updated information about the viewing habits of Pakistani young adults, their understanding of themselves and the Pakistani culture, and their place within it with regards to the role of Netflix.

This is an original, exploratory research that aims to fill a massive gap, contribute to related existing literature, and provide a foundation for further research with regard to similar topics.

1.6 Limitations of Study

Since the topic of the study is original, there exists a dearth of literature from which to draw upon. Secondly, the sample size for this research is limited since most students have been returning to Pakistan due to the Covid-19 pandemic. With a small sample size and lack of quantitative techniques to back up the qualitative work, reliability and validity will differ in a study that contains both. The sample size is also not completely representative since there are fewer females compared to males.

Chapter 2

FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE

Attempts have been made to ground the concepts of culture and identity in various disciplines however none have been able to present a definition that covers its complexity in its entirety. This has as much to do with the abstraction of the concepts themselves as it has to do with how convoluted they are, changing not only when looked at through the prism of varying theoretical constructs but also other disciplines and their underpinnings.

2.1 Exploring Culture

The definition of culture most widely found in textbooks, and one that I have personally encountered many times is that of the British Anthropologist Sir Edward B. Tyler. His belief is that culture is a complex whole of practices and capabilities acquired by “man” (Spencer-Oatey, What is Culture?, 2012). Although widely accepted and subsequently used in various academic textbooks, it leaves little space for the acceptance of the cultural exchange that has been creating a more diffused global society. While his understanding of the complexity of culture is spot on, his assumption of it being whole is problematic, not to mention that his use of the word “man” reflects a patriarchal connotation.

(Spencer-Oatey, What Is Culture?, 2012)’s view of culture more aptly covers the topic albeit in only a few words:

A fuzzy set of basic assumptions and values, orientations to life, beliefs, policies, procedures and behavioral conventions that are shared by a group of

people, and that influence (but do not determine) each member's behavior and his/her interpretations of the 'meaning' of other people's behavior.

In comparison with Tyler's definition, this one does not echo any innate completion. By calling culture a "fuzzy set" which is a simple, yet effective way to accept the vagueness and complexity of the concept itself, there is an understanding that the shifting communicative paradigm and power imbalance leaves little room for practices and capabilities to remain concentrated within one nation, society or set of individuals. Oatey's definition is also more gender neutral than Tyler's which is an important aspect considering that gender imbalances are prevalent in the Pakistani culture, a theme that has surfaced in both the literature review and analysis. Although Oatey's definition is fuller than other similar definitions, it leaves space for wider interpretation and inclusion. Matsumo's definition adds to this take on culture by including the idea of "generational transmission" seeing that although cultures are subject to change, chunks of them are passed on from one generation to the next.

Culture is thus not a static entity but a dynamic one, encompassing both visible (or material and invisible (non-material) aspects, from food and clothing, to thoughts, feelings, and ideas (Zion & Kozleski, 2005). This dynamism is reflected in how Spencer-Oatey believes that they influence, but not determine the way people behave, which is exactly what allows things to change within any given culture; there is a balance of individual agency and a sense of normativity.

Cultural interaction has long since been a part of cultural evolution and the changing media dynamics have contributed to this cultural exchange. Canadian communication theorist Marshall McLuhan, a believer of the world entering a fourth age which he

termed the electronic age, put forward the idea of the “global village”- a world shrinking in experience due to shared information and experiences with regards to ever increasing connectedness (McLuhan, 1967). If we are to go by his view, it seems almost as if the cultures of the world are coming together to become more homogeneous (a village itself is not just a close space of people who know each other but a place of routine, shared lifestyles and practices), and thus similar which, under present circumstances, seems to be a farfetched idea. What should not be ruled out however, is that the level of interconnectivity he refers to does have consequences, especially in terms of identity which will shortly be explored.

The idea of the global village is thus important for its stress on interconnectivity and bringing together individuals, societies and nations in a way that has hitherto not happened. It’s best to see this idea in terms of globalization, where the widespread interconnectedness of cultural, social, political and economic practices encompasses national boundaries (Yeates, 2001) as a result of technological development (Yalcin, 2009) and capitalist expansion, although there is debate about whether capitalism has caused it or is just a part of it (Hosseini, 2015). Either way, it cannot be denied that globalization and its subsequent interconnectedness has brought the world together in a way that has increased dependency and intercultural exchange.

Arjun Appadurai, an Indian-American anthropologist and globalization theorist, calls this exchange one of “global cultural flows” where all around the globe there is movement occurring in five different dimensions that Appadurai calls “scapes”; these dimensions are the ethnoscape (related to persons such as refugees, tourists, laborers etc.), technoscape (related to technologies and their fluidity), mediascapes (related to the medium itself and the content within), financescapes (related to currency,

exchange, and the market), and ideoscapes (related to ideologies, especially at state level).

Appadurai's belief is fairly different from McLuhan's; he believes that though the world may be complex and overlapping in its dimensions, the argument towards cultural homogenization is overrated and based more on nationalist fear building narratives and hiding inner hegemonic practices than the truth itself (Appadurai, 1990). While his key dimensions offer a more structured way of viewing globalization, I feel that his disbelief in a center to periphery model for the existing world order is a tad relaxed, considering that the effects of colonization are still in play.

2.2 Exploring Identity

Much like culture, "identity" too has been explored in various disciplines, most of all sociology and psychology. Stemming from the basic philosophical question of "Who am I?", the concept as a "sense of self" has been viewed from both an internal point of view (as one of innate desires and agency) and an external point of view (as one of societal interaction that overpowers any innate capabilities). Thus, identity has been an issue of contention and contestation that differs depending on the lens or backdrop that is used to study it. This is why it's considered a vague and rather dicey term; a suitable way to look at it would be that on a personal level, our identity helps us possess a certain level of uniqueness that more or less stays the same overtime, creating a certain distinction between us and others, and on a broader level, and in terms of this thesis, a cultural level, our identities mingle with those of others creating similarity which helps with identification (Buckingham, 2008). In my opinion, this similarity helps create a distinction as a collective which sets one country apart from the other.

The two major ways of understanding identity are through the psychological and the sociological perspective with the former focusing on an individual's agency, and the latter focusing on group influence. George Herbert Mead, a functionalist American philosopher and social theorist, believed that the existence of the self depends on the culmination of the experiences shared between individuals via identification, empathy, and reaction (Lindholm, 2007). According to Herbert Mead the sense of self or one's identity is dependent upon their interaction with others, not their inner desires which is a more Freudian, egoic way of looking at things. Although I am personally more drawn towards the functionalist approach to identity, it's important to note that it strips away a certain amount of agency from the individuals, focusing more on their passivity and absorption of influences instead (Buckingham, 2008). Here I revert to Spencer-Oatey's view of how an individual's behavior is influenced, but not necessarily determined by group dynamics, which is exactly what allows for changes and progression. If identity does not change, neither would culture, both of which are quite certainly impossible.

Two major theories spanning the same debate that deserve recognition for their influence and popularity are the social identity theory and identity theory. The former theory believes in identification as the core component of identity formation and the latter believes in self categorization instead. Identity theorists believe that individuals perform roles and associations made with that role are a part of the self, and when it comes to groups, roles differ according to the reciprocation between individuals and the negotiation they have with each other, whereas social identity theorists believe that the self develops not from playing roles, but indulging in group where interaction provides similar perspectives and a certain level of uniformity contrasted within an in-

group/out-group relationship (Stets & Burke, 2000). Since we're concerned with studying identity on a cultural level, which provides a broader landscape with which to work, I think it's important to put together both the role and the group based identities because they both function simultaneously and reflect the dichotomy of cohesion and independence taking place within the Pakistani culture.

On a national level, the study would of course be incomplete without using Benedict Anderson's concept of Imagined Community. Nations cannot exist without forming and maintaining an identity of their own. The Western notion of the nation depends upon the homogeneity of language, culture, geography, economics and ethnicity (Islam, 1981), something that Anderson feels is considered natural but does not believe in. In his view, nation building has a lot to do with narrative construction which is not natural, but imagined. He considers nations to be political entities that build unity between its members through print-capitalism, where the variety of ways in which language is made use of, from newspapers to novels, displays a discursive sense of unity without the members having to meet, hear or even know each other (Anderson, 1991).

This discursive narrative is able to produce an emotional bond, not unlike religion, and define community, although in his view it is vernacular languages that become powerful, something that is not the case in the Pakistani context but the importance of discursive politics is an important aspect that will be discussed in the literature review. Seeing that Pakistan quite literally came into existence upon the very idea of Muslims having a separate nation, Anderson's ideas fit the narrative. The introduction and maintenance of Islam as the invisible thread that holds its citizens together is the sense of unity upon which the Pakistani community stands.

Whatever the narrative may be however, it does not exist in a vacuum. With globalization in our midst, it is important to realize that identity, in all its glorious liquidity, does present a challenge at the national level. Myron Lustig, an authority on Intercultural Communication, expands on this by explaining how identities are in a constant state of flux and so can change depending on the given circumstances and context (Bajracharya, 2018). For Lustig, cultural identity is an ever changing process of learning, understanding and internalizing the various aspects of culture as one's own self-concept, as well as questioning and accepting, which ultimately provides a framework for organizing and interpreting one's own and others' experiences (Lustig & Koester, 2010).

Pakistan's identity and its cultural flows need to be understood from a place of acceptance for its colonial past for which reason I would like to take into consideration the concept of Orientalism put forth by Edward Said, a Palestinian American academic, activist and literary critic (Britannica, Edward Said, 1998) who developed Michael Foucault's idea of knowledge and power around the discourse produced by Europeans about the Middle East and Asia. This discourse was bound in a sets of binary oppositions between the Europeans and non-Europeans (Kohn & Reddy, 2006) where the latter was conceived, in a Eurocentric manner, as inferior and backward in comparison to the former.

Although in Appadurai's belief the global cultural flows are pushing aside the center to periphery model, the unequal power balance that exists between developing countries like Pakistan and developed countries like the United States of America (USA) are quite prominent and there is still an element of power and domination that exists between the two. The Orient is, according to Said and in comparison with

Anderson's narrative, imagined by the West- not that the location itself does not exist, but its representation through political, Eurocentric eyes is different from reality. Representations such as these are still ripe in the Western mediascape as will be discussed later.

Considering the discussion for both culture and identity above, I would like to extend a tentative definition that by no means wishes to prove reductionist, but aims to organize and provide a narrative with which to work through the rest of the study:

Cultural identity is a dynamic, ever changing sense of self, at a collective level that provides social-political and cultural cohesion in the society and nation, without restricting its evolution via interconnectedness with other cultures, yet maintains a certain level of cultural uniqueness that sets it apart in its distinction. This identity, whether natural or imagined, is political in nature, and is represented and maintained strategically through discursive and capitalist means.

Using the framework developed, this literature review will explore themes of cultural identity, the Pakistani culture and its furthering of the Pakistani cultural identity through local cinema and TV, and the impact of international films and TV over it, especially with regard to Netflix.

2.3 A Colonial Legacy: Identity Crisis from the Root to Now

Jinnah's inaugural speech, delivered in English, although not the sole factor as we have seen in the introduction, but a significant one, set in motion a series of events that has brought Pakistan where it is today in terms of ethnic, national, cultural, and historical confusion. After separating from the British Raj, the colonized territory that turned into Pakistan focused on trying to establish a new identity free from the imperial hierarchy of the British and the shared cultural heritage with India, where its Hindu counterparts resided. It is safe to say that Pakistan was an imagined community, one that found political opportunity within the creation of the narrative of Pakistan.

Nothing about Pakistan was “natural”, there were ethnic divides, language differences, and the Eastern (now Bangladesh) and Western (now Pakistan) wings of Pakistan were geographically separated by India. While Anderson focuses on a national narrative that somewhat trumps religion, Pakistan’s narrative lay in adopting Islam as the national religion despite having other religious elements inside the country.

Where Anderson believed in the power of vernacular languages rising to power in a bottom to top approach, Urdu, the language of a minority of elites, was chosen to become the national language of Pakistan. Both these actions were taken in a bid to connect the various ethnicities together and distance itself from India, the bearer of Hinduism, a polytheistic religion which conflicts with monotheistic Islam (the religion of the Arabs whose script forms the basis of Urdu). If one were to read Pakistani history textbooks, the ideological tilt is clear; the sub-continent is divided into Hindus and Muslims, not only playing down other religious groups but also creating a distinction between them as two separate nations although in truth, both not only coexisted but also shared common culture and customs (Afzal, 2015). This is exactly how print-capitalism works; Anderson’s belief in the power of language and its political use is clearly visible in the Pakistan’s history textbooks. One of the most interesting things about the subcontinent is that until a census was conducted by the British, the number of Hindus and Muslims was unknown (Afzal, 2015). The need to shun Pakistan’s pre-Islamic heritage and root its identity in religion instead of the diversity of practices and beliefs available throughout the centuries starting from the Indus Valley civilization that dwelled and flourished in the space now torn between boundaries has led to its culture becoming fuzzier and more complex overtime; not to mention that the way history has unfolded, especially in political matters has affected it further.

Islam has been used as a foundation to solidify the cultural identity of Pakistan, albeit vaguely, considering that the various sects and schools of thought within the religion offer a mélange of doctrinal frameworks that mutually contradict each other; having a general consensus was hoped to constitute a firmer identity and help construct a moral narrative with which to rule. This is a reiteration of the faith based identity that Pakistan has been trying to build since the very beginning instead of acceptance the past and forging something new. In Islam (1981)'s view it was more a lack of proper ideological grounding and policies engaged in by the Westernized elite of the country, before and after independence, that influenced the way Pakistan moved forward more than the ethnic differences as is usually claimed.

It is due to this lack that Islam, as a cover for the movement and the post-independence chaos, later gained popularity and East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) was treated as secondary to West Pakistan, being forced to accept Urdu as the national language despite an overwhelming majority being Bengali and having shown resistance to the idea before the partition; there were talks about modifying the Bengali script to resemble Urdu more closely goes on to show just how important linguistic difference were to the politics of Pakistan and its sense of self, considering that the language movement for East Pakistan became a focal point for the beginning of a separatist movement which eventually resulted in the independence of Bangladesh (Islam, 1981). It would thus be prudent to extend Mead's understanding of language and its intimate ties with the development of the self (Aboulafia, 2008) from individuals to nations (a larger community built up of smaller communities consisting of individuals or selves) because the language Urdu, and its Arabic script, has from the start been

seen as vitally important to the development of Pakistan's sense of self. Using Urdu reinforces Pakistan's self-image as faith based.

This is precisely where things begin to get tricky. Although Urdu was made the national and official language of Pakistan in hopes of allaying a civil upheaval between the varying masses, it did little to form the foundation that was hoped for since English, one of the major remnants of Pakistan's colonial past, was made the second official language of the country. From passports to identity cards, all official documents issued by the government are either in Urdu, or English, or both. This added to the conundrum the founder, Muhammad Ali Jinnah laid the foundation for with his inaugural speech and it is safe to say that this move benefitted the Western educated elite in leadership positions within the Muslim League more than it affected the masses who were more focused on regional languages than either Urdu or English, but the self that Pakistan was trying to achieve fell in peril.

Pakistan's mainstream educational system, till date, is divided into two distinct streams of learning: private schools with English as the medium of instruction and Urdu offered as an additional subject, and government funded schools with Urdu as the medium of instruction and English offered as an additional subject. This not only produces a completely different breed of students but also individuals, since the attitudes and beliefs associated with the two languages have various differences at the core. The colonial legacy of English is associated with power and status, and a study conducted on English as Second Language (ESL) learners from the Lahore College for Women University (LCWU) showed that the formerly Urdu-medium students felt an increase in confidence after studying English and yet became more formal, isolated, selfish, and differed in opinion from their non-English speaking familial counterparts

(Anbreen, 2015). This subtly reflects the individualistic social values of the West as compared to the collective social values of the East and displays the polarization that exists between English and Urdu on both the macro (national) level and the micro (individual) level in terms of a division between the sense of self.

Another study based on the adoption of Native-English speaker accent in addition to learning the English language carried out in the National University of Modern Languages (NUML) in Islamabad found that without losing the strength of connection students have with their culture and homeland, they remained open to adopting native-like English accents and foreign languages in general (Zahoor & Kausar, 2018). What is interesting is that they claimed that having this positive outlook towards adopting accents and languages does not affect their cultural identity and that they possessed a strong sense of loyalty towards Pakistan; this claim is important because the author notes that all ethnic and cultural identity is based upon regional languages (which have more speakers than both English and Urdu) that have cultural shame associated with them instead of power and sophistication (Zahoor & Kausar, 2018).

It is around this elitism surrounding English that a term was coined around the 80s by a Pakistani comedian who referred to young individuals that were spoiled by riches, preferred fast food and Western culture, and remained detached from the ground realities of the country as *Burger Bachay* (translation: Burger Kids) (Maher, 2016). The term has been used mostly in a derogatory manner by those who do not associate with Western culture and values, do not possess a British or American accent, and do not prefer fast food. With Appadurai's many scapes coming together through technological shifts and exposure to cultures through the media, the line between both is slowly beginning to blur and it is interesting to note that individuals who have

studied in elite schools with English as a medium of instruction may still not want to associate with the Burger community and take pride in local culture and heritage.

The term however has become so widely popular that in 2013 a then budding rap group from Karachi, Young Stunners, released a rap song named *Burger-e-Karachi* (translation: Karachi's Burger Kids) detailing the general aspects of the Burger subculture in the city of Karachi. The lyrics portrayed the Burger Kids as rich, belonging to elite schools, using technology, distancing themselves from locals who do not possess the same privileges and values to the point that they do not even visit the same places as them, are equipped with the latest fashion trends and have familial ties in the USA. The song, which would more colloquially be called a diss-track, became very popular cementing the existence and accuracy of the Burger lifestyle.

While the Orient itself is the "Other" and is home to "othered" people, it is interesting to note that this Burger community seems to other its own people while feeling close to those who other them. This is both fascinating and alarming. Edward Saeed's work on Orientalism considers the dynamic between the Orient and the Occident (the East and the West), looking into the Eurocentric view of European/Western colonizers and imperial hierarchies as one of power imbalances, biased representations and resultant binary oppositions; according to Saeed, "the Other" is seen as primitive, irrational, barbaric, static, and emotional while the one being othered by, the Occidental "Us" is scientific, advanced, rational, modern and civilized (Burney, 2012). With the Burger community, influenced as it is by Western values, one wonders whether they may have, consciously or subconsciously, internalized the perceptions of the Occident while belonging to the Orient.

This ever expanding subculture shows that Pakistan's cultural identity is far more complex than one would assume. Hassan & Schwartz (2018) conducted a study on the identity formation style of the Pakistani youth in relation to Berzonsky's Identity Style Inventory model which identifies three main styles as being universal. Although in context of western theorization the Pakistani youth was expected to rank higher on the normative scale, they found that even in a more normative culture like that of Pakistan, an individual's need for autonomy can be expressed without having to belong to an individualistic culture since participants were able to create and manage their identities despite cultural and familial constraints. They go on to challenge western theorists and their work, believing that normativity is more complex than is currently understood and posits that by studying Pakistani culture new insights can be added to the existing identity formation literature as emerging Pakistani adults reveal a culturally bounded agency that is reflective of a complex interplay of reasoning, negotiation and reconciliation between personal likes and normative influences.

Just as understanding the identity of Pakistan requires a basic understanding of its internal politics, it mustn't be forgotten that a significant part of the identity of a young Pakistani adult revolves around their political leanings. There is an open divide between the right wing and the left wing in Pakistan, with the former closely linked to religious and/or conservative beliefs and connection, and the latter linked to secular and/or liberal views. Sajjad *et al.*, (2017)'s study on the political stances of the Pakistani youth's concluded that given a choice between radical religious, secular (and in this context Western), and a liberal religious view, the youth would prefer the latter which adds to the diversity and complexity of both Pakistani culture and the constitution of the Pakistani youth's identity.

One thing is for certain; the impact and infiltration of religion into the depths of Pakistan's culture cannot be denied. Durrani (2008) quotes governmental texts that reveal official policies regarding education to have a sound Islamic foundation and promote a positive attitude towards Islam while presupposing teachers and students to exclusively be Muslims instead of Pakistanis (the implication of the latter being that faiths other than Islam exist, something that the policies explicitly evade in an almost proselytizing attitude). It is not surprising thus that the students in (Durrani, 2008)'s study choose primarily to label themselves as Muslims rather than Pakistanis. In reviewing the drawings they created, the idea of being "Pakistani" was heavily expressed in Islamic religious symbolism putting on display how internalized religious identity is with cultural identity. The textbooks assigned for their studies were also heavily layered with gendered representations, exhibiting more male figures than female figures as national icons and in positions of authority, while images of females were presented as homemakers. This would tie in with the common conception of men being more privileged than women in Islam, which is a bone of contention among various scholars yet widely, societally accepted at the same time.

An analogous stance from a similar study conducted by analyzing Pakistani curriculum being studied by overseas Pakistanis in Dubai showed an overarching religious theme in the construction of the national identity; religious symbolism melted into national identity signifiers suggesting that the creation of Pakistan had been deeply spiritual and a divine cause (Qazi & Shah, 2018). In conversations with students, trends of othering (Muslims versus Non-Muslims/ Good Muslims versus Bad Muslims), gendered ideals for women (those who follow the norms being worthier of respect), and pushing non-Muslims to the sidelines reflected a deep cultural divide present in

Pakistani nationals living outside the country and a tendency to view globalization from a narrow-minded perspective. What is most interesting about this study is the author's use of Foucault's concept of power/knowledge and technologies of power through which the author understands the Pakistani government uses Islam as a technology to establish ethnocentric power relations that encourage social polarization and tilt the power balance in favor of the Muslim majority.

Foucault's study of power began from trying to understand the place of individuals within systems where they became passive recipients, and thus subjects, of the social dynamics within, and ended with a paradigm shift towards acknowledging that individuals have the power to resist, especially in micro-relations within everyday practices. This shows that power is a transformational force more than a repressive force and that despite the technologies used and the agenda cultivated, the society is free to explore alternatives and resist the status quo. This explains why, despite the emphasis on Islam and Islamic values, liberal religiousness, openness towards foreign languages, adoption and enjoyment of values and practices of other cultures is still welcome.

The same reasoning cannot however be extended to the Pakistani diaspora settled abroad. Bashir & Tang (2018)'s study on 1st, 1.5, and 2nd Pakistani American generations provides a varied perspective on how Pakistanis living outside the country develop and maintain their identities while interacting with a culture different from their own (keeping in mind how Pakistan is traditionally a collectivist, and America an individualist culture). Most of the participants found it hard to separate religion from culture, believing that they were woven together like choices of clothes and edibles that came directly from religious beliefs and were thus a part of their identity.

They admitted that balancing religion and culture was a struggle and that operating within two cultures meant holding onto specifics from the sacred scripture while continuing to be an interactive part of the larger American social network. Interestingly, both the first and the second generation preferred calling themselves Pakistani Americans instead of Muslim Americans which is what the 1.5 generation preferred.

A similar study by Ghaffar-Kucher (2015) produced more conservative results with participants considering Pakistani culture to be the superior culture in comparison to the American culture serving a moral compass with which to guide their children and protect them from immoral or, synonymously un-Islamic practices that are a part of the American lifestyle since Pakistani culture is equated with Muslim culture. The researcher points out a budding fear of Americanization and the resultant cultural fossilization, where beliefs and practices of the original culture are repeatedly practiced in an unchanging manner out of nostalgia even though they may be changing in the original culture.

Interestingly, the disparity in both approaches lies in the socio-economic background of the participants; in the first study, participants belonged to middle/upper class backgrounds whose transition, in the belief of the latter study's researcher, is easier considering that they have been exposed to Western education and values due to the media and lifestyle in urban parts of Pakistan, while the participants from the latter study belonged to the working/lower middle class backgrounds. It would be interesting to note that this dynamic is quite similar to the burger/*desi* polarization been mentioned before, which means that belonging to a Pakistani diaspora may not change the overarching narratives that exist in the Pakistani culture although it is expected for

changes to take place more conveniently and quickly while living in Pakistan than living abroad since there isn't a sense of loss and lack of exposure to culture to push forward the need to preserve.

2.4 Contemporary Media Practices and the Rise of Netflix

Carrying forward Foucault's ideas, in the initial decades the Pakistani government's technologies of power were newspapers and the radio, but soon after the television, state owned PTV's broadcast, began to rival them. As a state funded entity, the content of the channel was family friendly and presented the government in a positive light even in the days of the military dictator Zia-ul-Haq (who set forth a wave of Islamization to legitimize his coup) when a crackdown on newspapers in opposition of his reign happened quite frequently.

In an interview with senior Pakistani journalist Imran Aslam, also the president of the popular news channel GEO TV, he reminisced about the plight of newspapers in the time of Zia-ul-Haq when upon irking the government the consequences could result in imprisonment and the publications being shut down (Ali, 2009). He further speaks about how the management was often targeted through news print quotas and cutting down the advertising provided by the government.

Zohra Yusuf, another journalist working in the Zia-ul-Haq regime remembers bans and fines in addition to imprisonment (Yusuf, 2019). Considered a more benevolent dictator, so to speak, Pervez Musharraf was the army general whose media privatization policies flooded the TV with a slew of local and foreign news and entertainment channels; a move that contrasted starkly with Zia-ul-Haq's policies. Where Haq was the man who Islamized, Musharraf raised the flags of enlightened

moderation, creating the sense of a free media; in essence however it was just make believe because the media in its new found freedom was ultimately given codes of conduct that favored the government, restricted the ease with which they were testing the limits of freedom, were ordered to fire important anchors and had to support the government or else face bans. This did eventually happen when Musharraf declared a state of emergency and banned all channels from being aired, even ones related to entertainment (Pirzada, 2007) (Ali, 2009). This wasn't the first and wouldn't be the last time that the entertainment channels and industry would have to bear the brunt of political turmoil within Pakistan. As compared to news channels and films however entertainment channels have fared well in general.

It must be acknowledged however that the revival of films and TV dramas in the country both began in Musharraf's time, however TV dramas did not have to start from scratch the way mainstream films did, although having to compete with Indian and Turkish shows did give them a rather slow start. Star Plus, an Indian entertainment channel that gained household popularity in Pakistan was consumed to the point that even primary level children were able to name characters and quote lines from TV shows since they were more exposed to Indian TV shows than cartoons. This is because back in the day, and even now in a majority of households, there is usually just one TV that the whole family uses and watches together. Since the elders have more control over the content consumed than the children, children automatically consume the content that the adults do and Star Plus was practically feasted upon when I was growing up.

One of the most interesting aspect about its TV shows was the culture of apparent matriarchy present within the narratives that mostly revolved around *saas/bahu*

(translation: mother-in-law/daughter-in-law) relationships. Khan & Zaheen (2011)'s study on patterns of decision making, gender roles, gendered behaviors, and lifestyle choices found dominant themes of stereotypical gender roles with an overwhelming amount of female characters confined to the domestic sphere however, they were highly assertive and bold in terms of decision making.

This contrasts with the themes commonly found in Pakistani TV shows where working women are often included to provide a polarity with the protagonist. Ashfaq & Shafiq (2018) notes that the protagonists are usually conventionally beautiful girls (young, fair skinned and slim) who either belong to the village or a lower to middle class family, are uneducated or less educated, financially unstable, calm in situations no matter how problematic, generally passive (especially towards parents) and wear ethnic or national attires.

In comparison to that the supporting female actors are mostly upper middle class women who work, are well educated, wear Western attires, are aggressive in their actions and stances, and usually lose when pitted against the protagonist. A good example of good girl/ bad girl trope (and by that stretch the Islamic/Western trope) would be the TV shows *Hamsafar* (translation: Soulmate) and *Mann Mayal* (translation: A Heart Inclined) where the male protagonists fall in love with the female protagonists and the supporting female actors, despite their confidence, education, budding careers and independence, end up committing suicide upon being rejected by the male protagonists.

Similarly, while Indian dramas empower women within the domestic sphere, it is clear that their powers remain limited to traditional, stereotypical roles and though the

narrative might depict a matriarchy, it is simply patriarchy in disguise. The same goes for Pakistani shows where the Eastern female protagonists who follow the patriarchal societal norms tend to succeed in comparison with the West-inspired woman with Western values. This is thus not just a religious but also post-colonial pushback.

Although a fascinating area to explore, studies on the relationship between the media and cultural identity in Pakistan are few and far between. A study on Mexican-American students and their caretakers residing in Mississippi found out that media messages, especially those depicting Mexican stereotypes, are crucial at impacting the issue of cultural identity within the children more so than the caretakers. Results showed that the three youngsters who had been interviewed spoke English with each other and communicated in Spanish, English and Spanglish with their parents, were not fluent in reading or writing Spanish, did not watch Spanish shows, and did not associate with the Mexican community due to stereotypes about Mexicans (Polito, 2016). This study is comparable with Pakistani young adults and their relatives; many Pakistanis from the burger community will be able to relate to these findings. If one comes across individuals from the burger community, or even children who attend elite private schools, it is easy to notice them communicating solely in English with a tinge of American accent, realizing that they do not watch Pakistani shows or associate much with those who are not from the burger community in order to separate themselves from the stereotypically *desi* (translation: traditional/local) individuals and the content produced by them. What is significant is that although the Mexican-American individuals developed this attitude while living or after having immigrated to the USA, Pakistanis from the burger subculture do so while living in Pakistan.

With varying lifestyles and subcultures present within Pakistan, it is important to acknowledge the lack of diversity in the entertainment industry and how the media, along with the government tries to sell a uniform identity of what Pakistan is and consists of while simultaneously allowing for exposure to international content and resultant cultural values. Shah & Khurshid (2017)'s research highlights this issue, revolving around the idea that apart from the school curriculum, it is important to observe the societal curriculum underway in Pakistan and the values it imparts, an important part of which is to understand media influence. The study concludes that TV shows and advertisements appearing on Pakistani channels are an important part of daily life and should thus be aligned with the social and religious values present within the Pakistani culture since they have considerable effects on viewers considering how materialism, offensive content, and improper language is becoming rampant.

If we zero in on the particular kinds of shows airing on Pakistani television, (Juni *et al.*, 2014) studied the effects of popular Indian TV serials on Pakistani viewers, concluding that Indian culture may be replacing Pakistani culture by promoting sexual behavior, usage of Indian words in day to day conversations, and extracting traditions that are in direct contrast with the religious values of the Muslims of Pakistan. This is unsurprising considering that (Hasan & Subhani, 2012)'s study exploring the viewership patterns in housewives and their connection with TV shows concluded that soap operas are used for escapist pleasures. It is interesting how the author considers Indian culture a threat considering that Pakistani culture is still a part of the Indian culture in terms of language, customs, and foods, considering the heritage that they have shared. This goes on to show just how successful the political indoctrination of the government has been on the Pakistani society and the individuals within.

Regarding the concerns that the author has, with the paradigm shifting from exclusively Indian to Turkish and Western TV shows, they can just as easily be taken into account for the latter.

Housewives, having greater access to the TV, control what is being watched thus setting a narrative for the kind of content consumed by children. Dattoo (2010) conducted a focus group discussion with urban, high school students in Karachi on their understanding of the global/local cultural flows and identified the influence of Indian films/soaps and Western films/soaps to be of importance in reshaping culture, reinventing traditions, and reinterpretation of history, amongst feelings of anxiety and ambivalence related to self-identity. Similarly, a study focusing on the effects of Turkish soaps in comparison with religious values, local norms and cultural attitudes among university students showed that students are easily influenced by the lifestyle and fashion sensibilities of Turkish actors, that the representation of women is more westernized even though Turkey is a predominantly Muslim majority country, and that Turkish soaps do not reflect a Muslim lifestyle but that it does not affect the religious values of the university students answering the questionnaire (Iqbal, 2018). It is interesting to note the conflict in the answers; the students don't believe that their religious values are affected even though they believe that their lifestyle is easily influenced. It could be argued that since university students are older than high school students, they are more set in their ways and thus less likely to be as influenced as the former, however the contradiction still stands.

With the popularity of Turkish TV shows it is a wonder how Turkish music hasn't made it to the forefront the way Indian and Western music has. Rana *et al.*, (2011)'s study regarding the importance of music for the Pakistan youth showed that music was

the one activity that the youth chose over all indoor activities and some outdoor activities, and especially over watching TV. Although the researchers have not delved deep into the why of it, especially with regard to TV, I feel that there are two important reasons: the first being familial and individual preferences not matching and the second being a lack of youth centric television programs.

This view is strengthened by the fact that the reasons given for said association with music falls under categories of developing the imagination, relieving boredom and tension, getting through tough times, and reducing loneliness which are all things that engaging TV shows are able to do. What is interesting to note is that although the writer included a list of genres to choose from, putting Western Pop as a separate category (which along with classical music/*ghazals* came out on top as most preferred) there was a curious absence of the Indian mainstream music category the words of which, being close to the colloquial Pakistani speech is easily understood and quite popular despite the TV shows falling out of favor.

To complicate matters further, religious TV shows have seen a growth spurt in the television industry. Bieberman *et al.*, (2016)'s study on televangelism on Pakistani television uncovers the overall conservative theme with stereotypical, orthodox views on women and religious minorities, religious governance, opposition to multiculturalism and interfaith coexistence. Although there are some dissenting views regarding these themes, the overarching narrative remains firmly wedged and so does the loyalty the youth has with cultural values, since although a majority of the youth sample does not prefer to watch these shows by themselves, they would do so with family and consider it an important social act.

When it comes to Pakistani films, the one thing that they have had in common with TV shows is the patriarchal narrative with the good girl/bad girl trope. As stated earlier in the introduction, a part of the Pakistani cinema history has been the rape narratives of the 70s, used to further storylines and important plot points. The political atmosphere of the 70s, right before the Islamization of the 80s, was one where the socialist leader Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, who belonged to a feudal background, was coming under intense scrutiny for being unable to deliver on his promises of *roti, kapra, makaan* (translation: bread, clothing and shelter), the widely chanted slogan of his party.

The slogan was meant for the common man, and so were the action-packed Punjabi movies that began to take over Urdu movies, pitting the common rural man against feudal lords (Ahmad S. , 2016). In these films the good girls, much like the protagonists of Pakistani TV shows, were those who followed societal norms and so were saved from any and all tragedies befalling them, so much so that in some movies they were saved because the call to prayer made their rapists stop. The bad women who were westernized, wore sleeveless attires, were independent, visited nightclubs, danced with men, and consumed alcohol were narratively punished through rape. Women whose sexual purity was not in question and yet became victims killed themselves to protect the “honor” of their male familial members. In a country where honor killings take place for women who have been raped and lived to tell the tale, caught behaving in a socially questionable manner, rumored to have done so, eloped or raised their voice to marry according to their own will, this trope comes as no surprise. Prior to the 70s and its violence, there was a *mélange* of genres present within

the industry, from social realism and romance to horror, fantasy, and satire (Khan, 2015).

While the 70s brought regional films to the forefront, the late 2000s have been bringing it back to the mainstream Urdu movies again. There are two basic types of contemporary Pakistani movies found in the industry: one is the somber, socially realist movie tackling a social or taboo issues, and the other is the *masala* (translation: spice) movie, a reflection of the Indian movie aesthetic that consists of action, comedy and romance with storylines that are lighthearted and easier to digest. Conservative religious elements do surface from time to time, protesting against TV shows or films that try to point a finger at them or deal with topics that make them uncomfortable, a recent example being the Busan International Film Festival award winning movie *Zindagi Tamasha* (translation: Circus of Life) by veteran director Sarmad Khoosat with a storyline that revolves around a popular *naat khwaan* (translation: reciter of poems that praise the Prophet Muhammad) whose career plummets and he is socially shunned after a video of him dancing at a wedding goes viral on social media (BBC, 2020). This led to conservative elements petitioning to the censor board for a ban (Rashid, 2020) and the director receiving threatening phone calls (The News, 2020). With the censor board finally giving the movie a go ahead (The News, 2020), the industry seems to be picking up pace despite contention.

TV and cinema have, for a while, been rivaled by online streaming and that is precisely what led to an opening for Netflix in Pakistan. What gives Netflix the edge that it does is the fact that the once DVD mailing service had the hindsight to adapt to the ever changing technological environment. This gave Netflix the first mover's advantage that other streaming websites like Hulu and Amazon took time to understand. One of

the most unique features that Netflix offered in comparison with TV was the concept of an ad-free, binging experience that had never made it to TV because ads and the one-episode-per-week or one-episode-per-day model was important for revenue, something that Netflix, with its subscription model, put to rest (Cannata-Bowman, 2016). Not only that but Netflix has begun to invest prominently into content production efforts, putting on display a high quality entertainment portfolio by hiring top-notch cast and crew thus welcoming more and more subscribers that stay for years to watch their favorite shows (Bylund, 2018).

Sim (2016) feels that not having to pursue an ad related revenue model has provided Netflix with the liberty to experiment with narrative and visual styles, and take more artistic and aesthetic risks that would otherwise be hard to do on television. He does warn however that it is important not to lose sight of the fact that technologies inherently benefit owners more than users, which is why although individual agency might be the put to the forefront, it is still important to keep an eye out for agendas, not to mention that autonomy means being in control, something that binge watching disproves. Bucciferro (2019) takes a similar point of view, agreeing that while a wider representation (sexual, racial, ethnic, and linguistic) of individuals brings about much needed diversity, the company may not be advocates of social change and simply want to expand their profits by reaching a larger audience as there is still a lot of content present on the site that caters to cisgender, white men.

Whatever the case may be, one thing is for certain: Netflix is spending billions more than TV channels like Columbia Broadcasting System Corporation (CBS Corp), Time Warner and HBO and it is paying off in terms of a global appeal and ever expanding business which means that they have created a winning strategy (Clark & James,

2016). Lobato (2018) shows that there are various questions yet to be asked and answered when it comes to the more expansionist attributes of the Subscription Video on Demand (SVOD) king; it is important to question the ratio of local and American content in non-American countries, whether American content dominates (thus creating sub-debates regarding cultural imperialism and TV flows), why there is unevenness where content is concerned in terms of establishing strong markets in bigger countries but foregoing smaller countries, why there are markets where Netflix does not actively compete and many others, but what is undoubtedly relevant is just how much this new, evolving and complicated entity is offering to global television research.

A big part of Netflix's importance is that other than the technological shift it has caused, it was able to disrupt linear broadcasting. Linear broadcasting can more easily be understood in terms of "flow", a concept coined by Raymond Williams that describes television's text as linear and flowing, moving sequentially from one thing to another. It has been refined overtime with individuals such as John Ellis questioning the linearity of the content, something that he believes is more relevant to cinema, adding instead the idea of segmentation wherefore television texts, in his opinion, are segmented into groups (White, 2001). Although shows on Netflix do have end credits after each episode, a button to switch to the next episode, and a theme trailer at the beginning of an episode (both the former and the latter can be skipped by choice) the episodes are still a step closer to the flow that Williams refers to, seeing that the binging experience in general is uninterrupted by advertisements and should the end credits and trailers not exist, the episodes can be easily stitched together to form a coherent narrative much like in a movie.

This flow and the medium bringing it forth was one of the electronic sources that were to bring about a global village, a key term provided by Marshall McLuhan that represented a more interconnected global society with resultant positive and negative consequences in a quest for identity as global communication increased (Gibson & Murray, 2012). With Netflix's expansion calling it Global Television or Global Internet Television wouldn't be far from the truth. With shows from various countries being shown in other countries, the world is indeed becoming a village. Consider shows like Money Heist (originally Spanish), Dark (originally German), 3% (originally Brazilian) and many others that can be accessed in places like Pakistan and the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus brings to the forefront new languages, places and cultures for the audience to witness, presenting newer opportunities to open up culturally. However optimistically the idea of globalization is seen, it is vital to understand that it does not come as an equal opportunity for all since power is not equally distributed among the many nations that exist. Power relations are thus important to be kept in mind, and through the expansion of Netflix one could question whether it is just another ploy to increase US profits and political prowess through soft power. Not to mention how important it is to understand the role Netflix would play in places where populations are already facing an identity crisis, like Pakistan.

I know a crisis is a tall claim to make, especially when having asserted that identities change, much like Lustig claims, but what is important to recognize is that Pakistan built too hollow a narrative for itself in terms of religion. Without acceptance for its pre-Islamic heritage or even the proper implementation of an Islamic government, not to mention becoming more open to the global cultural flows, Pakistan is falling prey to losing its distinction, its uniqueness. The country is stuck in its ways, and without a

proper strategy to construct its narrative and subsequently its cultural identity on, allowing an entity like Netflix may invite trouble, especially since, for now, the media flow is only one way with Pakistani young adults consuming more international content than Pakistani content and the country not having launched its own Netflix Originals so far either.

In post-colonial discourse, post-colonial communities are looked at in terms of producing what literary and cultural critic Homi. K. Bhabha calls the “Third Space” which is a space where the previously colonized masses are able to understand perspectives from the point of view of the colonizer and the colonized, thereby creating hybridity (Meredith, 2000). Granted that the Pakistani cultural identity will not be pure for that would be an essentialist and wrongful claim, the in-between-ness, in my opinion, is a space that can slip from negotiations and navigations between two different perspectives and cultures, and tilt through power imbalances towards the colonizer, thus causing a crisis.

Moving back from the digression however, a secondary aspect of power would be the influence of Western culture, not simply in beliefs and ideologies portrayed through movies and TV shows, but on the entire lifestyle. It has been discussed before how Western culture, compared generally to Eastern culture, is one of individualism instead of collectivism so it should be taken into account how Netflix, a service that can be accessed from any device and tailored to the needs of the watcher means that instead of sitting together as a family (the way it is usually done in Pakistan) and watching similar shows, users will be able to use Netflix and separate themselves as needed. Of all the articles that I have come across, this point is one that hasn't been made but is one of importance.

Research on Netflix is limited, focusing mostly on its prize winning algorithm, its marketing strategies and the effects on binge watching. Talks about culture have been far and few, making it to the fore in an ephemeral manner before the next topic comes buzzing in. This is precisely why this research study is so important; not only does it fill a gap in literature related to Pakistani media but also in international literature related to Netflix.

Chapter 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

As an original research with a niche topic that is the first of its kind, this thesis is an exploratory study that is purely qualitative in nature which enables me to use an interpretive approach towards concepts like culture, identity, nation and the likes as social constructs that are changeable and thus subjective (Rahman, 2016). This accounts for a certain level of pluralization, diversification and differentiation towards lived experience and construal understanding that makes possible new contexts and perspectives through rapid social change that cannot be done through mere empiricism (Flick, 2009).

With a shift from modernity towards post modernity, conceptual abstractions are best dealt with in a qualitative manner, where answers are nuanced and able to identify complexities and produce newer areas of research. The concepts used in this study, especially in terms of Pakistan and its cultural context, are far too multifaceted to be dealt with in a deductive manner. To carry forward this approach, I have conducted semi-structured interviews with 15 Pakistani nationals, those living in Pakistan and beyond the border in a Pakistani diaspora, and have analyzed the interviews using the textual analysis approach.

3.1 Research Design

As has been mentioned, the research design is qualitative in nature and makes use of semi-structured interviews. Advantageous in how it allows for both closed and open

ended questioning, semi-structure interviews allow for both shorter, direct answers and longer, intricate answers, depending on the context (Adams, 2015). Although it takes quite a bit of work, from setting up the interviews and conducting them, to analyzing the data itself, semi-structured interviews provide depth and work well with small groups (ibid).

For the study, the participants were asked a series of questions (Appendix A) regarding Pakistan, the culture, the values, the media, and Netflix. The reason I used the semi-structured approach was to develop questions that would provide me with independent thought and yet help provide a direction to the answers in order to help establish the context more clearly since discussions around broad topics like culture can encompass a vast array of sub-topics. Follow-up questions were asked only when participants strayed from the topic, or provided an insight that needed clarification or further exploration. To analyze the qualitative data gained through these interviews, I used the textual analysis approach. Using a thematic analysis helps the researcher make sense of texts that can otherwise feel vague and perplexing by providing an inductive approach where answers can be systemized through codes, patterns and themes that organize broader conceptual topics (Braun & Clarke, 2012). Due to the subjectivity of the narratives, there is no correct way to interpret the data which is where the textual analysis comes into play owing to the fact that, when put into context, there are a number of possible interpretations (McKee, 2001).

3.2 Sample Selection

Due to the pandemic, many Pakistani nationals have been returning to their home country which is why I used the convenience sampling technique with a branching focus on snowball sampling techniques.

Convenience sampling has been particularly advantageous in the sense that during the Covid-19 chaos, it was easy to interview participants that were readily available however, it must be pointed out that because of this religious minorities and female participants have been underrepresented in comparison with a primarily male, Muslim majority sample and is thus not particularly representative of the Pakistani population (Etikan *et al.*, 2016).

A convenience sampling method itself, snowball sampling is a more targeted way of approaching participants who possess the required characteristics, where existing participants are able to help the researcher recruit further participants for the study (Naderifar *et al.*, 2017).

In order to reach out to potential participants, I utilized social media platforms like Facebook and Instagram, using my personal profile, and that of the Pakistani Students' Society (EMU) to ask for volunteers. Those interested either directly messaged me or showed interest by commenting upon which I directly messaged them myself. Upon completion of the interviews, I asked the participants to reach out to their friends and request them to participate as well.

The population of the sample consists of 15 Pakistani nationals who are undergraduate students at EMU. They are all Netflix users between the ages of 18 to 25, with 4 female and 11 male participants, two of whom are Christians while the rest are Muslims. Although unintended, I was able to secure participants who hail from urban cities, small towns, and villages, which helps enrich the study by providing regional diversity. The study contains local Pakistanis and those living as part of the Pakistani diaspora in Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates (UAE) which provides a further layer of

complexity. The participants belong to different schools and departments ranging from Tourism and Hospitality Management, Mechanical Engineering, Banking and Finance, and more. For an organized profile please view Appendix B.

3.3 Data Collection Method and Tools

Using semi-structured interviews, I recorded the data on my phone and later transcribed it on a computer for analysis. Having contacted the participants through social media, I gave them an overview of the study, its aims, and the interview itself. They were asked to choose their preferred location and time for the interview and sent an electronic copy of the consent form that they would have to sign upon arrival. They were made aware of the fact that the interviews would be recorded on my phone and were requested to read the consent form once more before they signed. They were also made aware that verbal consent would be taken at the start of the interview in compliance with ethical concerns.

Through the consent forms, participants were given the opportunity to read their rights and their rights were also read out while the interview was being recorded. The verbal interviews were later transcribed for analysis.

Chapter 4

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

I have analyzed the data in this chapter using the textual analysis methodology. By using a thematic approach I was able to make sense of and arrange a large amount of data loaded with complex patterns and conceptual topics into concise themes (Braun & Clarke, 2012). The themes mainly revolve around topics of cultural identity, media consumption and Netflix.

The answers given by the participants have been discussed and arranged in a nuanced manner, containing general and selective perspectives which are both intended to add to the richness of the discussion.

The research questions that will be explored in the analysis are:

Q1. How do Pakistani young adults view the culture of Pakistan, and subsequently their cultural identity?

Q2. How have the Pakistani young adults navigated their way around the lack of youth centric content in terms of movies and TV shows?

Q3. Is Netflix aiding the identity formation, if at all, of Pakistani young adults in a manner that is contrary to Pakistan's cultural values?

4.1 Religion and Culture

With reference to pre-partition and post-partition details, I have evidenced throughout the literature review that Pakistan is an imagined community wrestling with narratives

that have only halfheartedly been implemented. From the time that Muslim emperors fell from grace as the British took over, to the way the Muslim elites felt politically cornered without proper political representation in contrast with their Hindu counterparts, the idea of a separate Muslim homeland was brought forth with Islam used as a force for political mobilization. This was an idea that did not sit well with the masses for a very long time, and garnered no support whatsoever until political favors began to be granted in the name of Islam.

The narrative built for Pakistan still influences Pakistanis to this day. For all participants, Islam is a pivotal force that affects their lives. I was expecting to find Islam to be the driving force for a majority of the participants but was pleasantly surprised that they could differentiate between religious and cultural values, although the two often overlap. Participants could not fully grasp the concept of the Pakistani culture, more often than not knowing what it is not than what it is which clearly shows a fragmented sense of self rather than a nuanced in-between-ness. It was easier for them to point out material aspects of the Pakistani culture, such as food (which a majority of the participants mentioned they love) and *Shalwar Kameez* (which is the national dress- a long tunic worn over loose, pajama-like trousers), but when it came to the more non-material, abstract aspects of culture, they seemed to struggle. I feel this is because the narrative link to Islam is quite strong despite its somewhat vague institutional and societal expression; for Pakistan the national, religious and cultural pool is quite homogeneous.

It was clear that levels of religiousness varied within the participants according to their location; villages are more conservative and Islamic, while cities are more modern with Islam not been taken as strictly into account as in the former. For Hamza Abbas

Maken, a 20-year-old belonging to the small town of Sargodha in interior Punjab (one of the most developed and populous provinces in Pakistan), Islam was heavily imbedded in daily life:

My family setting would be pretty traditional, pretty conservative. I mean, five time prayers a day, mandatory. Quran every day, mandatory.

His use of traditional is pretty important in this scenario because, keeping into account the narrative of Islam and nationalism which has been, in Matsumo's terms, generationally transmitted, traditions are heavily linked to religion. One could argue that the traditions of the land have been varied and historically speaking quite pagan, ranging from Vedic, Buddhist, and more considering that the land housed the renowned Indus Valley civilization. Traditions emanate from a heritage, and Pakistan has avoided plunging into the depths of its heritage and so they are now linked to Islam instead of the rich past that Islam was merely a part of, displaying an erasure, almost of forgetfulness of the land's historicity. That is the power of discourse, of narrative setting and of Benedict's print-capitalism. Pakistan's history textbooks, with their religiopolitical tilt have done their job.

For most participants, being religious was an important cultural value that they cherished. This is what Adel Naseem, a 25-year-old from the small town of Faisalabad had to say when I asked him what being a Pakistani meant to him:

To me it means everything. It's one of the third or fourth most important things to me. The top priority would be for me is God.

Thus, Pakistan's sense of self, and that of its nationals is closely tied with religion that has strong roots within the national and cultural system. The problem is that Pakistan has clung so strongly onto its religious narrative that it has begun to lose touch with its

own uniqueness that stems from a multi-ethnic, multi-religious, and multi-cultural past, thus creating ripples in its cultural identity. As Hamza puts it:

Staying Islamic, staying Muslim would be the biggest deal in Pakistan, culturally. If anything, it's one thing that matters to us the most is staying Muslim, staying Islamic or at least appearing Muslim. Religion plays a huge part in our lives, one way or the other. So yes, I guess, religion is the biggest deal. Other than that, I think Pakistan is undergoing a huge identity crisis, if I do say so. A huge identity crisis for people. We can't even decide on our ethnicity. One day we say we are Turks, the next day we say, we are Arabs. We can't even agree on our heritage yet.

This comment is spot on. Although Islam has been used as the invisible thread that holds everyone together, Islamic practices have wide interpretations. An Islamic government has as yet not come into play (always either a dictatorship or a democracy), and as explored in the literature review Islam has mainly been used as a homogenizing, uniting force for political legitimation. Yet its colonial past, its economic limitations, and longing for narrative recognition has led it to find allies that have exerted influences in ways that have fused into its cultural flows.

With a British education system pitted against the Pakistani education system, both of which are exceptionally different from each other, holding onto Islam for clarity yet leaning onto Islamic countries like Saudi Arabia, and secular countries like the USA and China for economic aid, thus allowing their influence to seep in, allowing Indian and Western media to be broadcast on TV and cinema while creating oppositional narratives, and now with the unsupervised and uncontrolled cultural flows allowed by the internet, an identity that wasn't stable to begin with has destabilized further, causing confusion and contradictions within the youth of Pakistan. The rootedness of Islam can be seen in the fact that even Pakistani Christians have to lead their lives in accordance with the symbolism of Islam, being a minority.

While the culture of Pakistan changes, religion is the only constant, and even that may become a factor of change in the future because the conservativeness brought forth by Islam as a religion is something that the youth wants to change. This is because the technologies of power used by the government, from textbooks, novels, newspapers and TV is not enough to counter the flows of the global mediascape. Still, all is far from lost. An important aspect of Pakistan's journey is how the technologies of power used by the government, namely religion, are loosening up and while the government still tries to use it as an oppositional force, the participants, as part of the masses, use it as a transformational force, holding onto it without letting it affect them in a radical manner. In fact, it was impressive to find the participants, ranging from the most remote locations in Pakistan, to moderately developed cities, to the most urbanized cities in Pakistan, and in Saudi Arabia, were moderate in matters of faith, which is a reminder of the (Sajjad *et al.*, 2017) study where it was found that the youth preferred a liberal religious point of view.

4.2 Prevalence of Patriarchy

A recurring trope during the interview upon which most participants agreed was that the Pakistani culture is a patriarchal one. As Sheima puts it:

It's a very masculine society.

This is quite an interesting point because if the Pakistani culture is so heavily influenced by Islam, it can be questioned whether Islam is a patriarchal religion itself however that would digress into a whole other debate. Both male and female participants pointed out that women do not have the kind of liberty that they deserve to have, something that I was not expecting to hear. When I was in my bachelor's and the same age as most of the participants of the study, I was constantly debating with

my male classmates about women empowerment and feminism, something that they made fun of and used to teasingly trigger me about. My expectation that things would be the same was completely reversed and came as a surprise mostly because a heavy majority of the participants were male and I did not expect them to recognize this problem owing to their biological and social privilege of being male/a man.

The status of a woman in the Pakistani society is one of contention; they are held both in reverence and in contempt, depending on the circumstances which is a dichotomy that showed up when I asked participants about cultural values they cherished and disliked. For the former, they appreciated how women were respected, and for the latter, they disliked how women were not respected.

This dichotomy can be more easily understood in terms of the media's gendered representation of women discussed in the literature review through (Ashfaq & Shafiq, 2018)'s study of the good girl/bad girl trope in Pakistani TV serials with the former being a traditional, submissive female and the latter being a modern, bold one who loses to the good girl every time. The former connotes an Eastern influence and the latter, a Western influence, being an extension of the 70s movies where rapes befell more westernized women as divine punishment and the eastern woman was saved through divine intervention if she ever found herself in a similar situation. While more and more women have begun to join the work force and hold jobs, there are many women, especially housewives who still watch these shows. Rabia Naeem, a 20-year-old female from Khobar had this to say:

My Mom did not like me watching Pakistani dramas. I think it was because of their whole mindset and she did not want to bring us up like that so she used to never let us watch that. She used to watch dramas but she used to send me to my room whenever I used to.

The contradiction is almost palpable. Rabia's mother was brought up in a strict environment that she did not want Rabia to be a part of and yet she went back to the same mindset even if it was just for entertainment purposes. This is even more troubling when one realizes that most of the participants' were exposed to such content in their formative years through their mothers. Asma Emmanuel, a 22-year-old from Islamabad, the capital of Pakistan talks about her mother:

My Mom is a working woman and yet whenever she used to come back home, she used to cook, she used to do the dishes, she used to do the laundry. So it's like even if you are moving towards change, it's like hand in hand. We still can't let go of the old values. If a woman is working, she is still expected to do all the household chores.

Although it may still be hard for women of the previous generation to break free of stereotypical cultural values and expectations, things are changing for the newer generation and most participants feel that feminism is an emerging trend. Daniyal Toheed, an 18-year-old belonging to Jazan said:

In recent times, feminism I would say it's growing a lot in Pakistan and it's definitely becoming a part of our culture.

What I found very interesting was how none of the female participants felt comfortable using the term feminist, and it was a male participant who did. Saqib Ali, a 20-year-old male, belonging to the small town of Buchekki near the cosmopolitan city of Lahore said:

Pakistan has a patriarchal culture. So being a feminist I don't support the patriarchal culture.

The idea becomes even more interesting when one takes into account the fact that he belongs to a village, and all the female participants belonged to large cities. Most participants, both male and female did not feel comfortable with the term feminism,

which is a rather controversial term owing to it being misunderstood as women governing men instead of being equal, but did support the empowerment and progression of women.

4.3 Shifting from Collectivism to Individuality

South Asians, in general, are known for their collectivist nature and it is common to be a part of joint family system. On the bright side, collectivism offers group support, yet on the other hand, disagreements can become dreary considering that everyone is so intermeshed in each other's lives that doing something by one's own self is akin to becoming the black sheep of the family.

While interviewing the participants I would ask them about their family backgrounds which, in all honesty, was somewhat of an ice breaker before the hard hitting questions began, but while compiling the results, I began to realize that many of the participants were living in nuclear families instead of joint families. This is not to say that the joint family system in Pakistan or in Pakistani households does not exist any longer, it simply means that a shift is occurring. While joint families serve as a support group, they restrict individual agency. I also noticed that the joint family system was more prevalent in villages, towns and small cities instead of urban cities, from which I have gathered that the more modern, and synonymously western lifestyles of urban cities provide a freer environment. Here Sheima compares her place of birth, Sialkot (a small city where she lived in a joint family) with the capital city of Islamabad (where she now resides with her mother and father):

We shifted here and it's just me and my parents. I've had a fairly good childhood in comparison to many people because there were not family issues involved.

The underlying implication here is that a good childhood that is free from family issues is one that can most probably be found in a nuclear family system instead of a joint one, although that doesn't necessarily have to be the case. Asma who spent her whole life in a joint family system says:

I learned how to deal with people who have anger issues, how to deal with people who are attention seekers, people who are sad or like just depressed and how to get them out of that... Other than that I learned a lot of good things like what's it like to have a family, what's it like to have someone who has your back because no matter what, at the end of the day, if something happens to anyone of us everyone would rush down and they would help and like the joy of having so many people next to you and celebrating with them and even crying with them. Everything was just beautiful I think.

Whichever way one might perceive having a joint family system, a shift from joint to nuclear is more significant than one would realize. A joint family system is an important part of the identity formation of the average Pakistani child, where adults come together to decide the fates of children and make major life decisions for them well into their adult life. This is why this shift spells out more agency and less influence, and even if there is influence, it wouldn't determine a person's behavior, they may or may not comply based on their wishes much like in Spencer-Oatey's definition.

Many participants spoke about their parents being more open minded in comparison with their grandparents. Although the internet is full of memes and comedic videos about "brown parents" and their invasive, dictatorial infiltration into the lives of their children, it seems to slowly be giving way to the children being given more agency. Yet even with all this agency, there is still a power dynamic that exists between elders and children. Respect towards elders, a dominant cultural and religious feature pointed out by the participants, is taken in a manner where raising one's voice is considered as

act of disrespect, even when the child is not wrong. Sheza, an 18-year-old resident of Dubai, grew up in a stricter household as compared to the rest of the participants but has found a way to work towards her agency:

Our religion or culture gives us so much more space to do so many things that we want to do. So we have us, as my generation, my siblings and my cousins, we have tried to slowly manipulate our parents and theirs to understand and get them to know that what is the norm and we are still on the right track. We are not doing anything wrong. It's just that it's different for them. Having more freedom, that's it.

Although belonging to a household with more open-minded parents as compared with Sheza's, the power dynamic between elders and children still exists at Ramil's place. Perhaps because of the varying levels of openness or gendered ways of dealing with things, or both, Ramil, a 19-year-old from Rawalpindi (twin city to the capital of Islamabad), looks at things a bit differently:

When I was a kid we were taught this thing so much that you cannot speak up to your elders and we should not disobey them, but now since I've grown up, I'm 19 years old so I can speak for myself. Now if I feel even if my uncle or my father is saying something wrong, doing something wrong, I'll go and say it to them that this is wrong, this is not how it should be.

The new generation is thus not just more open, but also more individualistic much like in (Hassan & Schwartz, 2018)'s study where they found that Pakistani young adults display a culturally bounded agency while the expectation was for them to be heavily normative. I feel that there may be a link between relative parental openness and the use of technology as well. A case in point would be Hamza, whose strict parents used to look down upon English and western content, yet now they watch it while owning Netflix accounts.

A reminder of the importance of this shift is that Hamza belongs to a very remote village with religious parents who believe in preserving their ethnic culture. It's very surprising to imagine Netflix being of use there but it's happening and it is changing perspectives. Many participants ruminated on how their parents have become more invested in the use of technology, especially YouTube, and possess various technological devices like smartphones, laptops and tablets where they watch Netflix or use other platforms of infotainment. This is a prime example of Appaduari's technoscape working together with the mediascape to cause a shift in identity. This has, in and of itself, left little room for families to get together. Saqib's family time is next to none:

I don't remember the last time the whole family sat together to watch something because like now everybody has their own devices. They have tablets and laptops and we have our own choice of movies and shows and we have our own Netflix accounts. It's sad but I think the need for our family to get together to watch a show which 90 percent of the people don't like has gone.

Saqib again, belongs to a village and lives in a joint family system. Ramil also nostalgically misses family time:

We unfortunately don't watch it (TV) together anymore which is quite unfortunate as we should do it.

4.4 Conservative to Modern: From Small Towns to Cities, Diaspora to the Land

There are two main trends that I've seen when it comes to this debate, both of which are locative. When interacting with participants belonging to villages, religio-cultural rules were far stricter as compared to larger cities or even smaller towns. Many participants, when talking about developed, urban cities like Lahore (a well-known cosmopolitan city of Pakistan), and Islamabad (the capital), believed that they were

more modern. This was inspired by how women were able to dress more openly, residents were affluent, and there were more opportunities available in terms of clothing, edibles and the general lifestyle.

Participants belonging to the Pakistani diaspora expressed that they felt Pakistan was more modern as compared to Saudi Arabia and the UAE. Some of them were surprised at how knowledgeable the Pakistani locals were. On interacting with the local Pakistani young adults, Sheza had this to say:

It was very different and eye opening to get to know how like teenagers or young adults in Pakistan really are. They are very open and they know about what's going on in the world, may be sometimes more than me. What I had in my mind was that they would be just grasping on to their own values and not open minded or not educated about the Western culture or Arab culture but turns out they know so much and sometimes more than me so Pakistan has young adults who are actually very cultured and they are just amazing people.

Hasher Salar, a 21-year-old, who moved from Quetta, a city located in the lowly populated and least developed province of Baluchistan, to the capital, Islamabad, felt that people were more open-minded in the latter while in his hometown they were a lot more private. While his parents saw a more modern way of living in Islamabad things changed when he travelled to Saudi Arabia where the rules were stricter and greater value was given to many things that people weren't too concerned about in Pakistan. An example Hasher gave was how women may or may not cover up in Pakistan depending on the location but in Saudi Arabia it was mandatory in a majority of places. The journey changed his parents, who went from being open minded to hardliners and so did he when he first came back to Pakistan.

When I was four or five years old my parents were open minded but as they moved to Saudi Arabia, by that time they tend to become more hardline religious so of course, as it is the case for most of the Pakistanis who live in Saudi Arabia, they have a hard time. Like I also had a hard time from moving to back to Pakistan because I see lot of different things in Saudi Arabia. In

Pakistan, they don't care about most of the things. And yes when I came here there was total different culture.

This is interesting because Saudi Arabia implements Sharia which is an Islamic law derived from the Quran (the Holy book of the Muslims) and the Hadith (the traditions of the Holy Prophet of the Muslims). This is what I mean when I talk about how Pakistan, although narratively an Islamic country has not used Islam to properly establish its identity. This goes on to show how Islam's use in Pakistan was and still is simply for political opportunism and legitimation, social cohesion, and an escape from its pre-partition past. The Pakistani diaspora in Saudi Arabia and the UAE have only religion in common with the Pakistani locals. For Daniyal, he's more Arab than Paksitani:

Naturally I would feel more like an Arab because my best friends were Arab. The food that I was eating was dominantly Arab. Songs that I used to sing were Arab. The entertainment that I was consuming was Arab. But my blood cannot be Arab. Yes, for that matter I consider myself as Arab in terms of my personality but from my heart, I am always a Pakistani.

If religion really was the cultural foundation of Pakistan, Pakistan would be no different from Saudi Arabia but it is. This here is the perfect example of the identity crisis I have been talking about; Daniyal's association with Pakistan is merely through lineage, not ideological. Pakistan has so much uniqueness that it refuses to tap into which is exactly how it may be losing its cultural identity. The more liberal religious worldview of this generation may help open the gateway, although that too is proving precarious.

4.5 Westernization of the Youth

The precariousness that I just talked about has its roots in this section of the chapter. In the literature review I discussed the burger/*desi* dichotomy where on the former end

of the spectrum is the young Pakistani adult who is rich, has studied in an elite, private school, consumes western media and fast food, and keeps themselves updated with the latest trends in technology and fashion. In comparison to that the latter is in tune with their traditions, prefer having Pakistani cuisine and wearing traditional Pakistani attire, shuns western media and clings onto their roots. This extreme, although once in existence has been dissolving quite rapidly with a larger in-between but examples still do exist.

Ali, a 20-year-old from Lahore, went to an elite school where students mostly spoke in English. Ali feels that young adults are being forced to love Pakistan when they don't want to, and turned against the Western media in rebellion of which they have become even more attracted to it. While Hamza's small town family used to look down upon Hollywood and video games, Ali was born into the technological world of PlayStation, laptops and all things Western. It seems harmless enough; the world is changing and we are all changing with it. That is just part of globalization but when a chunk of your own society cannot read or write the national language of the country because of outside influence, there is no space for in-between-ness left.

I live in a very posh place so I grew up speaking English, reading English and right now I can't read Urdu that well. I can speak it but reading it takes me a lot of time and writing takes me even longer because I've not been doing it. I can understand Urdu dramas but sometimes the words they say go over my head purely because I've not been exposed to it.

With his love for Western media and his inability to properly read or write Urdu, the national language of Pakistan, Ali's friends call him whitewashed. He admits to feeling lost, yet at the same time comfortable because he doesn't know what he is missing out on in terms of traditions.

When I asked participants how they would describe a young Pakistani adult, a majority stated that they are influenced by the West. What is interesting to note is that none of the participants who live in the major cities of Lahore and Islamabad came up with this answer. Westernization is understood better in terms of Americanization because American media is pretty commonly accessed in Pakistan and the American accent is hugely favored.

Hamza raised a similar point regarding how Pakistanis have begun to shift from the British to the American accent. Pakistan's education system may be inspired by the British but the media is increasingly American with a number of American television channels being broadcast, American movies playing for weeks on end in Pakistani cinemas, and the introduction of Netflix which adds another layer of complexity to the mix. Hamza says:

The British accent is not cool enough anymore, so now we are towards an American one. Thanks to Hollywood and Netflix and all that stuff.

While in Bashir & Tang (2018)'s study participants feared Americanization which lead to a cultural fossilization where they held onto cultural values even more strongly than the locals themselves, Pakistanis are moving towards Western culture more than before. At first there was a binary, now there is a spectrum and without proper cultural foundations, slipping onto the Western end of the rope is easy.

4.6 Favoring International Media

Pakistani shows still have lot of cultural values which I actually appreciate because if they don't, they will just be literally copying the West and I don't want that because that's the slavery concept that we are still trying to get rid of.

This is what Sheima has to say about Pakistani shows and she is one of the only two participants who prefers both international and Pakistani content. Because of Pakistan's colonial legacy and subsequent leanings towards the West, she feels that influence from the West means becoming part of the earlier colonization. The rest of the participants however have a clear preference towards international TV shows and movies.

Muslim participants mentioned that the conservatism present within the culture of Pakistan is a notable reason for why the same formulaic narratives and plotlines are used over and over again, while the Christian participants believed it was because of religion itself. This is interesting because it shows that Muslim participants either make intentional use of this implication or unintentionally separate religion and conservatism, implying that there is a difference between both although from all that I have researched and discussed so far, this hardly seems to be the case. Daniyal points to the fact that the Pakistani entertainment industry is clinging onto the older generation instead of accepting and subsequently targeting the new one:

Their target audience has not changed into the youth of Pakistan. Their target audience is still the same people from the 1980s, 1990s and so that target audience is inevitably going to die out and all the audience they are going to be left with is the youth and the youth does not relate to the Pakistani industry as it is right now.

Participants also pointed out budgetary constraints due to which the quality of the content suffers. While the participants have at least some recognition of Pakistani TV shows, having seen them with their mothers or other interested family members, I do not feel that most of the participants had seen too many Pakistani movies, not being able to name more than three or four and did not talk much about Pakistani movies at all, having seen more Pakistani dramas than movies. This could be because access to

the dramas was easier at home due to their inherent consumption by the participants' mothers, but the cinema afforded more freedom towards what they wanted to watch. Talha Ijaz, a 23-year-old male from Lahore, prefers to watch content that has critical acclaim and merit:

I would love to prefer Pakistani shows and movies but they're not up to any of them. If I get to know there is a movie which is up to level, I do watch it.

A majority of the participants prefers international shows because they have better storylines, themes, cinematography, and technology. While conversing with the participants it was easy to see that many were not interested in the Pakistani industry and would rather see something radically different than follow through with the transition that is slowly taking place.

Although international content was once understood only in terms of Western or American context, Netflix has given the participants more options and a number of participants mentioned watching European TV shows and movies, followed by Asian. Turkish shows are also being consumed heavily as a whole with participants and their families both interested in them. At present the Turkish season *Diriliş: Ertuğrul* (translation: Resurrection: *Ertuğrul*) a Turkish TV historical fiction drama, is making the rounds with many participants excitedly mentioning it. Those who had not watched it already were interested in doing so and many participants mentioned their family and friends back in Pakistan being tuned into the show.

4.7 Netflix as a Lifestyle

This disconnect between the youth of Pakistan and the Pakistani media is what has paved the way for Netflix to become a household name, much like the Indian TV channel Star Plus once did, or the various Turkish seasons have, *Ertuğrul* at present.

A majority of participants use Netflix because it is fast, gives a premium feel, contains a variety of content and because their friends kept recommending shows that were only available on Netflix. Netflix Originals, the production of Netflix itself, is known for its artistic ventures and creative freedom and is one of the reasons why some participants subscribed to Netflix.

Rabia started watching a Netflix Original called Orange Is The New Black, an American comedy-drama series filmed within and regarding women's prisons, on third party websites but when its streaming became problematic, she switched to Netflix and has not regretted her decision since:

I subscribed to Netflix because I started watching this show online, Orange Is the New Black. I was like it's taking too long, I'm just going to get Netflix and that's how I got Netflix. Then I fell in love with it.

Saqib found himself in a similar situation with the Netflix Original Daredevil, a series about a blind superhero crime fighter:

So, I had to watch the third season of that show last year... I was not in Pakistan at that time so I couldn't download the torrent and so I had to watch it right on the day it was released and that show was a Netflix Original show so the only way I could watch it on the same day it was coming out was if I had a Netflix account, which I didn't, so I asked my friend if I could just borrow his card for "something" and he gave me his debit card for "something". Right at that moment, I made a Netflix account with my friend's card and I watched the entire show on Netflix and so that's where my Netflix journey started.

Saqib is one of the many participants for whom Netflix has become a part of their daily routine. Not only is it proving to be a status symbol considering that participants feel it has a premium feel, I feel that it is, what would colloquially be termed, the new, in-thing. Everyone is using it, talking about it and just like every new gadget that comes

to the market, if you don't have it, you feel left out. This is what Sheza has to say about her reason for subscribing:

What made me subscribe was my friends telling me and talking about shows. So I just wanted to be involved in those conversations but I continued on my own because I actually enjoyed these shows so much and I think I am kind of addicted to Netflix right now.

Some participants can't eat without watching Netflix, some spend hours bingeing every day, some like to log in at least once a day but what it boils down to is the fact that Netflix has become a vital part of everyone's life. A majority of the participants are happy with Netflix and continue to use it because of the convenience it guarantees. The ability to skip the introduction, being able to access the content where one last leaves it, browsing according to the mood, having everything in one place, being able to download content, recommendations, HD content, visual appeal of the website, being cheap, and able to access the service on TV are other important reasons that makes Netflix a darling among the participants.

Selecting from an array of genres like Cartoons, Anime, Drama, Action, Fantasy, Noir, Science Fiction, Rom-Coms, Thriller, History, and Documentaries, it shows just how much opportunity there is for the Pakistani entertainment industry if it were to reach out to the youth.

Although many participants claimed to have open-minded parents they did struggle with a certain level of agency, but with the increasing use of Netflix in houses, this might begin to change, especially because Netflix, with its availability across all internet devices brings about an individual viewing experience. Many participants have shared that their parents, even mothers, have begun to watch content from

Hollywood, something that was usually a domain inside the Pakistani cinema halls at maximum.

4.8 Netflix and Cultural Disconnect

Upon being asked whether they believe that the content of Netflix bore any similarity with the cultural values of Pakistan, many participants felt that there were next to no similarities between the content of Netflix and the content of the Pakistani industry or the values of the Pakistani culture. This is reflective of just how much western content is consumed since only a minority of participants, who had watched Indian Netflix Originals like *Sacred Games*, the successful 2018 crime thriller that showed street culture and the corrupt underworld of India, pointed out any similarity whatsoever. Participants believed that Netflix did not have an impact on their cultural values but felt that it did on their peers.

This answer connects back to the study of Turkish dramas on Pakistani university students mentioned in the literature review and its impact on Pakistani university students who believed that those other than themselves were being impacted even though their lifestyles were changing to some extent (Iqbal, 2018).

Both these cases are a reminder of the Third Person Effect, a hypothesis coined by sociologist W. Phillips Davidson where people perceive that the effects of media messages are greater on those around them (Johansson, 2005). Self-evaluation is a tricky thing so I'm skeptical about this claim however, the participants do make a compelling point. They believe that the lack of impact may come from having subscribed at a time when their values were more hard set which shows that future

generations may have more of an impact seeing that they will be growing up with Netflix.

Participants do still believe that Netflix is bringing about a change, and that though their cultural values may not have changed their perspectives have changed about the Pakistani culture because of Netflix. This reflects NUML's study mentioned in the literature review, where it was found that without losing the connection students had towards their culture and homeland, they were open to adopting native-English accents and foreign languages (Zahoor & Kausar, 2018). Sheza has found a balance between appreciating certain values while wanting others to change:

Some of the values I actually value more now and I think it's good that they are there. But at the same time some other things I really think should change like expressing feelings or just realizing mental health and such issues or just approaching your problems less aggressively and in a way better manner than it is dealt with right now and may be just giving people their rights.

Sheza's comment sheds light on the Othering that happens within the Pakistani society where cisgender, heterosexual, traditional (and synonymously Muslim) brown males are on top of the hierarchal ladder. Being holders of the patriarchy, things like women's rights, mental health issues, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer (LGBTQ+) rights and the like are a problem. As Saqib puts it:

A lot of movies on Netflix have been made in support of the LGBT community. Now, in my culture the LGBTQ+ community is not much supported and basically in Pakistan people go to the extent of hating the community. This is how much they disapprove of my community and now since I've spent 13 or 14 years of my life in Pakistan, in a place where I got to learn that I should not like a certain type of people, right? ... Most of my favorite characters were part of the LGBTQ+ community in the TV show, in the story. That made me love it even more since they were my favorite TV characters so in this respect Netflix has had a good influence on me.

While Netflix is exposing Pakistanis to new cultures and the various values within, it is subsequently affecting them which is both a good thing and a bad thing. For values that are harmful like undue discrimination that supports the hierarchal narratives, having Netflix bring about a change would help Pakistan become a more progressive nation, but for features that do no harm to be changed, like the Pakistani accent or the clothes, simply because other cultures are found more desirable because there isn't any youth centric content available in Pakistan can be a problem.

This can change if the Pakistani media tries to find out new avenues. Most participants felt excited about the prospect of a Pakistani Netflix Original and felt that it would mean better themes, acting, storylines, genres, newer cast and more open-minded, artistic freedom to make it happen. This would allow for a more equal cultural flow between Pakistan and the rest of the world, not to mention for the Western media to explore a more modern side of Pakistan. Participants have felt that the western media shows stereotypical representations of Pakistanis and Saadi, a 22-year-old from Lahore, puts it quite well:

It's more that it wants me to display the good parts of Pakistan in a way like we have seen, as Pakistanis. Any show that offhandedly mentions Pakistan, you know what they are going to show. They are going to show some sand or some camels. You are going to see a bunch of people in full *Abaya* and *Burqa* and *Niqab* and they are just going to be hurrying through the streets. You're going to see some men with head dresses and someone spitting in the street. You are like yes but that is not all there is to it, there are other things. It just makes me want to be more representative of Pakistan and what Pakistan means to other people.

Mentioning *Abayas/Burqas/Niqabs* (Arabic clothing for women that exists in a minority in Pakistan) or men spitting in the streets are stereotypes that show quite an Orientalist way of representation. In a similar vein Sheza worries that a Netflix original

might show racist stereotypes because she finds the Netflix team racist in some aspects even though she considers herself a Netflix addict:

I don't actually trust Netflix much to express the Pakistani community in the right way as I have noticed that so much of things that are on Netflix can be very racist. Just because they don't understand other cultures or they don't know how to express other cultures as well as they express their own so that might not be expressed very well.

This is interesting because there is an underlying assumption that no matter Netflix's bid to be an open platform for all cultures, there is still an American discourse surrounding the art of an Original's creation. This is not far from the truth. There is a certain distinctive style that every Netflix Original follows regardless of location and culture which has a western feel to it, not to mention the fact that they contain English songs on the soundtrack, some of which are even used in trailers which makes little sense when the Original does not belong to an English speaking country.

Some of the participants were skeptical about a Pakistani Netflix Original being any different from the mainstream Pakistani shows considering the conservatism present within the country. Although skepticism towards a Pakistani Netflix Original was put forth only by a minority, it shows just how deeply rooted in the symbolism of Islam the Pakistani culture is, which are words both Saadi and Hamza used during their interviews while the rest of the participants have only alluded to. While many of the values that have become a part of the patriarchal narrative do not reflect Islamic values, Islam is used to legitimize and oppose situations in a selective manner, making it difficult for Pakistan, and the entertainment industry specifically, to push forward a more progressive narrative.

With a majority of the youth, as reflected by the participants, valuing Islam and yet being open to concepts and ideas belonging to other cultures there is an opening for less conservative content, but the industry holds on to the formulas it knows best and onto the audience it already has rather than exploring other avenues which, in my opinion, is inevitable, but a process that is being delayed. Political involvement is also affecting the industry with notices and bans, and although Netflix can provide a way out as it does not have the same restrictions, not everyone is confident that controversies will not be created.

A notable reverie to come out of the data analysis is the emergence of YouTube as a competitor towards Netflix which was unexpected since subscription services such as Amazon and Hulu are direct competitors and thus easier to identify. A majority of the participants mentioned their family and sometimes friends, especially the females, enjoy using YouTube specially to access Pakistani and Indian content, which goes on to show that there is another gap that Netflix is unable to fill but it definitely fits the requirements of the youth, something that Pakistani media channels have been unable to do with an overwhelming majority of the participants clearly preferring Netflix to Pakistani entertainment channels.

4.9 Summary of the Discussion

Being reflective of the Pakistani culture through Spencer-Oatey's definition, we can be sure that culture is indeed fuzzy, and this fuzziness is culminating into an identity crisis. I have taken Homi K. Bhabha's idea of hybridity into account and while there is no challenging the fact that a third space has definitely been created, where the ideas of the colonizer and the colonized are being negotiated, I feel that with Pakistan's weak

narrative of Islam as a force of national cohesion, and the loss of its cultural uniqueness, this hybridity is slowly giving way to the influence of other cultures.

With the mediascape and the technoscape working together in what McLuhan terms the electronic age, this influence of global cultural flows is strongly affecting Pakistan with Pakistani young adults valuing their country out of a sense of nationalism, but unsure of what their culture is apart from the fact that Islam plays a major role in it.

It is not wrong for identities to change; social processes require changes in social context and without that, cultures would diminish but it is important not to lose one's uniqueness along the way. If Pakistan was to completely melt into the ideals and ideas of America, or Saudi Arabia, or Turkey, it wouldn't be Pakistan anymore.

The fact that Netflix is influencing certain aspects of the participants' lives like their clothes, accents, or thought processes shows that identity is definitely in a state of flux, much like Lustig believes. Netflix is providing a global platform for ideas, agendas, texts, beliefs, and values for users to consume. The problem with that is the power imbalance, because Netflix, in and of itself is a Foucauldian technology of power, may prove to be detrimental in countries with an unstable cultural identity. With the participants' generation beginning to show agency and exploring what the world holds, it is important to provide a grounding for them to rest their feet on which is why it is imperative for the Pakistani industry to focus on the newer generation, understand their values and beliefs, and then use platforms like Netflix to execute something that fits the in-between-ness.

A quotable example would be music shows like Coke Studio and Nescafe Basement, which make use of folk sounds meshed with popular music genres from around the

world to create hit songs. These shows are popular and have revived the once fledgling music industry of Pakistan by giving the audience what they needed. This is exactly what the Pakistani TV shows and movies need to do, but to do so there needs to be a narrative change at the national level, or maybe media being the agent of change can create that narrative change for the nation instead.

Chapter 5

CONCLUSION

This research is the first-of-its-kind, completely original research regarding the Pakistani youth and the connection of their cultural identity with Netflix. As a Pakistani who grew up trying to understand my place in the world and in my country I saw and experienced the various facets within my hometown, between different cities, and internationally as I travelled, something that made me want to understand how the Pakistani youth feels about themselves, their country, and the world they view through a screen even more than before. Recognizing a gap in the literature regarding the Pakistani youth's cultural identity with studies revolving mostly around the Pakistani diaspora communities in other countries such as the USA, and in literature regarding Netflix which is more focused on its marketing techniques, algorithms and business models, I decided to bring the two topics together and embark on an exploratory research regarding the two.

I started hearing about Netflix when I was in my bachelor's, around the time when Snapchat and Vine were gaining increasing popularity, but back then Netflix wasn't available in Pakistan and was exclusively used by a select few whose friends or family members were living overseas and shared their accounts. Before Netflix officially introduced its streaming services in Pakistan, people had begun to use VPN services to access Netflix left, right and center and the hype was beginning to grow. When I started to use Netflix, it became apparent why. The service itself and the originals

within were a whole other experience and the more people I came into contact with, the more I began to realize how prevalent the use of Netflix had become in Pakistan. Movies and shows that I was unable to access as a child, gave up on streaming out of pure frustration at my Wi-Fi as a teenager, were finally accessible. Not to mention the Originals with their inclusivity and diversity, gave me much to think about just like many of the participants I interviewed. The more I pondered about the service, its content, and its presence in Pakistan, the more I felt pulled to understand its position in the life of a young, Pakistani adult, one that has grown up with various external influences, each different from the other, all coming together to form who they are. When the idea finally culminated into the title of this thesis, I knew it was exactly what I wanted to do.

I would be lying if I said that this research was easy, but I wouldn't be lying if I said that it has changed my life, my whole world view about my own country. I knew the research was to be qualitative from the get go so when I first started gathering the material for the introduction and literature, the very basics that were to influence the techniques I would use to propel the analysis, I was inordinately surprised at the dearth of relevant material even though I had some idea that finding substantial links would be hard considering that both areas are negligibly explored. It took me months to uncover and put together journals, theses, documents and reports but it ended with a clearer understanding of my country and uncovering details that I had never studied despite having taken numerous courses on the history and media of Pakistan.

Although initially wanting to use a mixed method approach in fear of this study not having scientific merit, I then decided to take a risk and deep dive into the complexity of the narratives instead of the linearity of numerals. This has proven to be a good idea

because the conceptual abstractions of the terms, and the nuances of the framework and subsequent analysis is not something that numbers can do justice. In a world that is shifting from modernity to post-modernity, much like the cultural identity of Pakistan, qualitative practices uncover theoretical layers and provide depth. When I prepared for the interviews, I had some idea of what awaited me but there were definitely things that surprised me.

This research contains three focal research questions that I wanted answers for. The first wanted to understand how Pakistani young adults view the culture of Pakistan, and subsequently their cultural identity. The second aimed at exploring how the Pakistani young adults navigated their way around the lack of youth centric content in terms of movies and TV shows. The third tried to uncover whether Netflix was aiding the identity formation, if at all, of Pakistani young adults in a manner that is contrary to Pakistan's cultural values.

The sample for this research required me to find Pakistani nationals, aged between 18-25, studying at EMU, who used Netflix and spoke and understood English well enough to give a proper interview. Despite a majority of Pakistani students travelling to their hometowns due to Covid-19, I was able to gather 15 students for the interview through convenience sampling, with a focus on the snowball sampling method, due to which a majority of the participants turned out to be men/males.

Through the research it became clear that Pakistan was an imagined community that built its narrative for freedom and subsequent political ruling through Islamic symbolism that was hollow at the core. Islam has since continuously been used to legitimize politically problematic and culturally patriarchal acts conducted solely in a

bid for power. For every act deemed undesirable, every movie or TV show considered tasteless, Islam is the counter which is an argument few wish to stand against.

While asking interviewees questions, I was interested to see if and/or how they would bring religion into the mix. Although I assumed that participants would not be able to separate religious values from cultural values, they did despite their admittance of religion being rooted in the culture of Pakistan. As expected, participants did feel that religion played a huge part in the average Pakistani's experience but I was pleasantly surprised to take note of the moderate approach every single participant showed in their beliefs. Having experienced meeting radicals and religious extremists in my own class room back when I was in my bachelor's, the same age as the participants I interviewed, I was expecting to meet a few here as well seeing that EMU provides a representative sample of Pakistanis. From the most remote villages to the most urban cities and everything in between, one can find any kind of Pakistani here. It is heartening to see that change truly is underway.

I was also expecting to see major differences between the Pakistanis living in Saudi Arabia and those that have spent their lives in Pakistan, feeling that the former might be stricter, and more radical but what I came across was something completely different. The young Pakistanis who had fully or partially lived in Saudi Arabia ranged from moderate to liberal even though each held religion close to their heart. It was almost comical to hear how their expectations of their fellows were subverted, just as mine were, as they encountered an educated and knowledgeable group of individuals where they had expected an uneducated, backwards bunch. This is how powerful media representation can be; in many ways, both Saudi Arabia and Pakistan are

represented as radical countries, with connotations of poverty and terrorism attached to the latter.

In connection with the first research question, it is clear that although Pakistanis love their country, they are unsatisfied with their culture which is easy to spot in the way that they more easily came up with things they did not like about it than those they did. They do believe that Islam is a restrictive aspect of their culture and want that to change, and a vast majority is appreciative of the increasingly modern, individualist lifestyles. The problem with that is that, using the definition of cultural identity that I expressed in the framework, it is easy to see that the Pakistani cultural identity is in peril. There is an increased inclination towards the West, and although, because identities are dynamic, changes will occur overtime, the Pakistani culture seems to be losing its uniqueness because of the fact that under the hollow narrative of Islam, there is no proper foundation. Pakistan's sense of self revolves around the guise of religion. The uniqueness of folklore, pagan historicity, ethnic specialties and the rest are becoming lost.

It was fascinating to see the slow change in parental dynamics, with the majority being more open-minded than I had expected them to be. My own family was one of the very few who had been ridiculed for being too liberal, although having met individuals from various political and social leanings in the Pakistani society, I can safely term them moderates. Growing up, I was targeted for being too Western, something that is not just common in the Pakistani youth now, but also socially acceptable as long as ties to religion, culture and the nation are maintained to some extent although the limits of that extent are being stretched every day. It is incredible to know that parents are opening up to technology and using it for infotainment and also allowing their children

to make use of it, because when I was a teenager, that was not the case. My friends and I received our text and call only, non-Android phones when we were teenagers, and our personal laptops sometime around our bachelor's. Using the internet for anything other than work was considered a waste of time, and we were steered towards reading books or studying. Here however is a whole new generation being born with laptops, iPads, and parents who don't mind!

Although raised mostly with Pakistani and Indian TV shows, the content of both revolving around family politics, evil mothers-in-law, and submissive females, the young adults of Pakistan have carved out their preferences in mostly Western TV shows and movies, with a budding interest in European and Korean content. The one similarity between them and their parents, especially mothers, in terms of content is their interest in Turkish TV shows.

Netflix has opened up the channels for Pakistani young adults to be able to view all this new content, otherwise Pakistani, Western, Indian, and as of recently, Turkish content was the only kind broadcast in Pakistan. Participants felt that although Netflix is a part of their daily routine, it has not had a major effect on them in terms of their cultural values and beliefs, although they do admit that it has given them much to think about. I am skeptical of this self-evaluation but I do agree with the participants' claim that had they grown up with Netflix or been exposed to it for a longer time, they might have been more affected than they currently are.

I retain that Netflix's capitalist nature combined with the identity crisis occurring on a national level can become an issue. With the unstable hybridity that currently exists, the youth is leaning more towards other cultures than Pakistan's own. While young

adults feel connected to the country, and their culture through religion and seem to be open to more outside influences without feeling impacted it is hard to deny that a change in accents, clothing styles, and food is worrying especially since participants do not seem to find any links or similarities between the Pakistani culture and the content of Netflix.

The in-between-ness in which the participants are existing does have some upsides; participants do not wish to see radicalism, they do not want religion to be as firmly rooted in the culture as it is, they want the patriarchal traditions to loosen up so that women can become more empowered and the society can progress, and they want to see Pakistan build a softer image for itself around the globe.

It is thus imperative for the Pakistani media to understand that they have in the past and are still missing out on a huge market which could bring them artistic and monetary growth. What is also imperative is for the government of Pakistan to realize that they cannot keep targeting the pre-millennial, generation X any longer because the millennials and Generation Z are the new target audience and they come with new values, customs and practices which must be taken into account. It is not just the media that will have to change, but also the education system, the societal curriculum and the politics. If new narratives are not constructed, the young adults of Pakistan may begin to identify more with other cultures than they already do.

Since this is an original piece of research, there is much that can be derived and used for future exploration. For one, I believe that Netflix's role in identity formation is an important one seeing that it is part of the Global TV revolution, and if participants, past their early teenage years, are still reflecting on the content they are consuming

and letting it influence them, it is fair to question how a whole new generation's identity would fare if they consume Netflix since their childhood. A broader study on identity could also be conducted that does not have to tie to Netflix or the media but explores other avenues of influence and provides a more complex narrative. A study regarding participants' understandings of cultural identity, religious identity and national identity would be very interesting and reflect on the blend or separation of the three.

In terms of Netflix, future research could include research that compares Netflix consumption and its impact on different age groups such as children, teenagers and individuals in their early and late 20s. This could even be done for various socio-economic groups from middle class, upper middle class, and the elites to compare what is being watched, how it affects them, and whether the content consumed is somehow affecting their lifestyle. The possibilities are endless!

As for this research, it could be made better by being conducted once again, in Pakistan. It could be niched down to an intra-city research where individuals from different socio-economic segments, who use Netflix, could give interviews, discuss in focus groups and answer questionnaires to reduce bias and make the research more scientific. The research could also be conducted inter-city, or a comparative research could be made between Pakistan and its diaspora, from Saudi Arabia to the USA in order to increase the complexity of the research.

While identity studies related to Pakistani individuals have mostly centered around the Pakistani diaspora and Netflix's role in Pakistan has never been discussed at all, this study has opened up a new area of research entirely. There are multiple beneficiaries

of this research, from the government and the media personnel, to academicians, media scholars, psychologists, sociologists and more. Not to mention that if Netflix wishes to expand in Pakistan and create originals, they would benefit from understanding the culture, the concerns of the participants, and the kind of content they would like to see.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Interview Questionnaire

1. Let's start this interview with your background. Could you please let me know your age, gender, and hometown?
2. What kind of family setting did you have and how was it like growing up in such a setting?
3. What kind of cultural values did you grow up with and how have they evolved overtime, if at all?
4. On the subject of values, what do you feel are some of the most dominant features or characteristics of the Pakistani culture?
5. Being a Pakistani, could you elaborate on some cultural values that you cherish, and others that you don't?
6. This might sound like a heavy question, but it's definitely an interesting one to think about so take your time with it! What makes you a Pakistani and what does it mean to be a Pakistani to you?
7. How would you describe a young Pakistani adult?
8. Do you feel like the lifestyle of contemporary Pakistanis young adults, such as yourself, differs from that of your parents' generation?
9. Now let's take this conversation to a more fun side! Do you remember what you and your family used to watch on television when you were younger? How does it compare with the present?
10. Do you prefer Pakistani TV shows and movies or international ones? Please elaborate on why you prefer what you do so I can understand your choices better.
11. What do your family and friends prefer to watch and how do they watch them?
12. In your opinion, how do Pakistani TV shows and movies differ from international ones?
13. What made you subscribe to Netflix and how has your experience been so far?
14. How often do you use Netflix and what do you usually watch on it?
15. Have you ever wondered whether Netflix has had an impact on your cultural values as a Pakistani? What about your friends and family?
16. What has made you continue to use Netflix?
17. In your opinion, how does the content of Netflix, especially the Netflix Originals, compare with the cultural values of Pakistan? What are some of the similarities, or differences, or both that you have spotted overtime?
18. Has watching Netflix changed the way you feel about the culture and cultural values of Pakistan?

Appendix B: Participant Information Table

Name	Age	Gender	Department/Degree
Sheima Anis	20	Female	Film and TV
Asma Emmanuel	22	Female	International Relations
Daniyal Toheed	18	Male	Mechanical Engineering
Sheza Hafiz	18	Female	Biomedical Engineering
Saadi Naman	22	Male	Biomedical Engineering
Saqib Ali	20	Male	Banking and Finance
Ramil Ahmed	19	Male	Management and Financial Systems
Adel Naseem	25	Male	Public Relations and Advertising
Hasher Salar	21	Male	Business Administration
Talha Ijaz	23	Male	Engineering Management
Hamza Abbass Maken	20	Male	Software Engineering
Rabia Naeem	20	Female	Tourism and Hospitality Management
Ali Sajid	20	Male	Computer Engineering
Anosh Samar	21	Male	Banking and Finance
Jawad Qazalbash	22	Male	Banking and Finance

Appendix C: Sample Consent Form

Department of Communication and Media Studies
Eastern Mediterranean University
Gazimagusa, North Cyprus
Tel: 0533 8467863
Email: s.tehniat@gmail.com

Voluntary Participation Consent Form for Master's Thesis:

Pakistan's Cultural Identity in the Era of Netflix: Perspectives of EMU's Pakistani Students

Name of Researcher: Syeda Tehniat Hashmi

Name of Supervisor: Pembe Behcetogullari

The aim of this study is to explore the factors shaping the cultural identity of young Pakistani adults with an affinity towards the use of Netflix. Through the interviews that the participants will become a part of after signing this form, the researcher will explore their background, viewing preferences, opinions about the Pakistani culture and media both individually and collectively in terms of international culture and media, and their opinions about Netflix.

Dear Participant,

Thank you for your time, consideration and willingness to be a part of the Master's Thesis "**Pakistan's Cultural Identity in the Era of Netflix: Perspectives of EMU's Pakistani Students**".

As a participant you have the right to **a)** ask any and all questions regarding the study should you feel the need to do so, **b)** follow up with the study and review the materials collected, **c)** withdraw your consent from the research at any given time without explanation in which case all data collected will be omitted from the research and destroyed, **d)** leave during the interview should you feel uncomfortable and/or ask for any help needed to remove any sense of discomfort which will be provided, and **e)** remain anonymous in which case a pseudonym will be used.

Please understand that the data collected will be stored for a maximum of six years, and once analyzed will be submitted for publication which will become a part of EMU's research literature.

To attest to your consent, please complete the form below:

CONSENT FORM

Research Title: Pakistan's Cultural Identity in the Era of Netflix: Perspectives of EMU's Pakistani Students

Name of Researcher: Syeda Tehniat Hashmi, s.tehniat@gmail.com

Please tick the boxes to confirm that you agree to each statement:

- I have read and understood the information provided about this study
- I am satisfied with the topic and have asked/ will continue to ask any questions that may arise
- I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I may withdraw from the study at any given time without explanation
- I agree to take part in this study

Name of Participant:

Department/ Degree:

Address:

Phone:

Email:

Date:

Signature: