

SAIDA WAHEED GENDER INITIATIVE

NEWSLETTER SPRING 2025



LUMS

Saida Waheed
Gender Initiative

OVERVIEW

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The Saida Waheed Gender Initiative (SWGI) had an exciting Spring semester filled with many important and engaging conversations. We are very grateful to our audience from within the LUMS community and beyond for their time and active participation in all discussions. We believe in platforming interdisciplinary work by both academics and practitioners. We are guided by an intersectional approach to gender-based research and gender justice, therefore learning through all quarters is imperative for us and is reflected in our programming.



EVENTS

VOICES OF RESISTANCE: PASHTUN WOMEN MOBILIZING FOR CHANGE

SWGf and FEMSOC hosted this impactful discussion bringing together three distinguished activists—Ismat Shahjehan, Jamaima Afridi, and Moniza Kakar—who explored the critical role of Pashtun women in political movements and grassroots activism.

The conversation opened with a historical overview of Pashtun politics and the systemic challenges faced by Pashtun communities. Moniza Kakar, a prominent human rights lawyer, shed light on the legal and social injustices affecting Pashtun women, particularly in the context of displacement, enforced disappearances, and land rights. She emphasized the ongoing struggle against the militarization of Pashtun lands and the resilience of women who continue to resist despite threats and violence.

Ismat Shahjehan, a veteran activist, delved into the colonial legacy shaping the region's political landscape. She challenged mainstream narratives that reduce Pashtun identity to tribalism, asserting that Pashtun women have always played a crucial role in political movements. She also critiqued Pakistan's federal structure, arguing that it

has historically marginalized Pashtun voices.

Jamaima Afridi, a journalist committed to amplifying underreported stories, spoke about media censorship and representation. She highlighted the limitations placed on Pashtun women in journalism, recounting her experience covering the Great Jirga of Khyber and the biases she faced as a female reporter. She stressed the importance of owning narratives and ensuring that Pashtun women's stories are told on their terms.

Through this dialogue, the need for collective action, informed discourse, and a reimagining of political spaces where Pashtun women are not just included,

but leading the charge for change was emphasized. The event served as a powerful reminder of the strength, resilience, and unwavering spirit of Pashtun women in the fight for justice and representation.



THE MAZE OF REPRESSION AND POSSIBILITIES: FEMINIST POLITICS IN PAKISTAN

This conversation was based on our programme manager Aimen's five-year research with Aurat March and Aurat Azadi March, and her organising experience in both feminist and leftist spaces. This research is undertaken as part of the Sustaining Power: Women's Struggles Against Contemporary Backlash in South Asia project, an ESRC-funded collaborative research project encompassing Bangladesh, India, Nepal, and Pakistan.

Aimen charted the ways backlash is operationalised against the marches and how entanglements between digital and non-digital publics



inform repression through disinformation. She also shared how disinformation is weaponised to curtail political activity and create violent circumstances. Her work also uncovers the contours of different backlash actors and insight into their modalities of

spreading propaganda against feminist assertions, and political activities. In the last leg of her conversation, she invited us to think of political futures despite what seem like insurmountable odds and calls for building solidarities grounded in humility and collaboration.



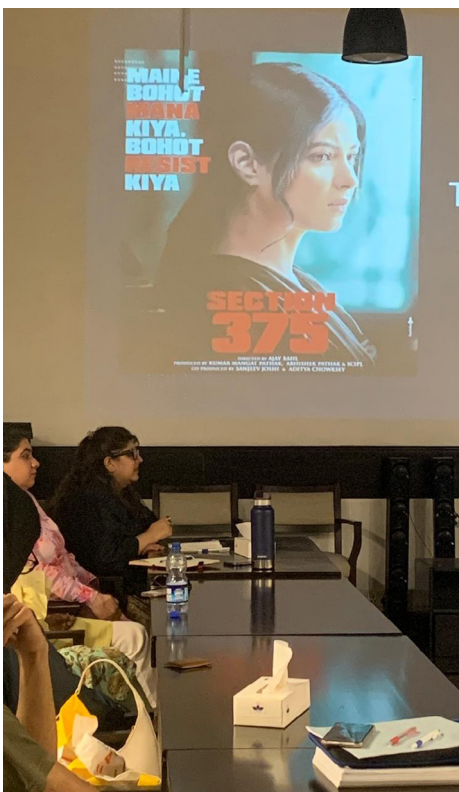
GENDER VIOLENCE, LAW, AND CONSENT IN NEW BOLLYWOOD COURTROOM DRAMAS

Dr. Amalie Goul Dueholm, a postdoctoral fellow at LUMS joined us for this conversation. Her research and teaching lies at the intersection of cultural production and politics, with particular attention to the entanglements of gender and sexuality with citizenship, law, and state-making. Drawing on close readings of courtroom dramas like *Pink* (2016) and *Section 375* (2019), and particularly how such films frame sexual assault as a matter of ‘marzi ya zabardasti’ (will or force), in this talk Dr. Amalie considered what such films can



teach us about how law and cinema produce knowledges

about desire, sexual violence, and the law.

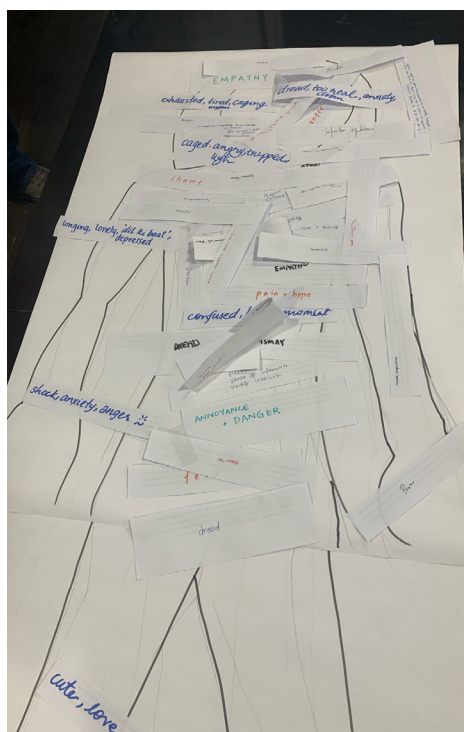


FROM BODY TO TERRITORY: A WORKSHOP ON SOLIDARITY IN WOMEN'S FICTION IN NIGERIA, CHILE, AND PAKISTAN

Yeisil Peña Contreras, a PhD student at Northumbria University joined us for this conversation. She studies tricontinental solidarities in contemporary Postcolonial literature written by women from Nigeria, Pakistan, and

Chile. Her research interests include transnational feminist theory, and recent political movements involving women. Using and adapting the framework of 'cuerpo y territorio' (body and territory) a geographical method from

Latin America for the study of embodiment by Sofia Zaragocin & Martina Angela Caretta (2021), Yeisil prompted the audience to connect fiction to reactions on the body. To do this she shared brief excerpts from Chilean, Nigerian, and Pakistani fiction written by women in English. Participants were asked to react to the excerpts of the fiction by writing down an emotion out of each excerpt so they can put it on the body. A range of emotions like anger, dread, sadness, joy came up during the session. This was an embodied learning experience followed by a discussion on how writing can evoke deep reactions and build solidarities.



STUDENT RESEARCH

The Saida Waheed Gender Initiative offers small grants for student-led research and senior projects that use gender and/or sexuality as a major analytical tool in their work. Every year we organise an event where students can share their research with the LUMS community and receive feedback from their peers and faculty. Each year we receive exciting grants that center rigorous research and deep engagement with theory. The grantees of this year were:

Between the Binaries: Parlour Owners of Chungi Navigating Public & Private Spaces
- Minahyl Haider Shah

Analyzing the Influence of Emotional Labour on the Predominance of Women in the Lady Health Worker Program
- Khizra Jamil Khan and Anaya Javed

Bridging the Gap: Exploring Barriers to FinTech Adoption and Gender Disparities in Pakistan's Financial Technology Landscape

- Hamza Mubashir, Mahnoor Nasir, Muhammad Hamza and Zernab Akram

From 4-star to 5-star: Heera Mandi and the Suburbanization of Baba Syed Safdar Ali Bukhari (RA)
- Mishaal Hussain

Genetic Engineering and Reproductive Genomics: Ethical and Religious Perspectives under Shariah Law
- Ali Abbas Gilani and Mahnoor Sakina Naqvi

Reclaiming Space: The Politics of Dance in Pakistan's Public and Private Spheres
- Aymen Hashmat and Samar Waqas

Pashtun Landay and Female Narrative
- Muzna Syed

HUM Dramas & the Complicated Art of the Girl Tragedy
- Mina Shoaib



COLLABORATION

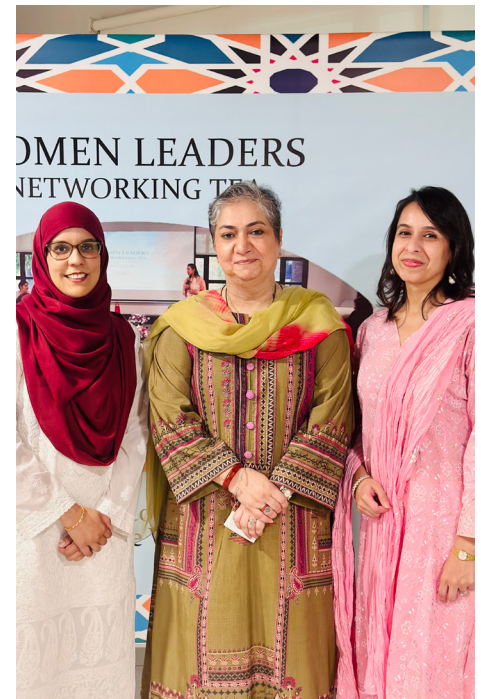
ANNUAL WOMEN LEADERS NETWORKING TEA

The Chaudhry Nazar Muhammad Department of Economics and the Saida Waheed Gender Initiative at LUMS collaboratively hosted the Annual Women Leaders Networking Tea on Saturday, May 31, 2025. The event brought together inspiring women from across education, health, academia, and the development sector for an engaging and thought-provoking conversation on the realities of gender in the professional world.

Participants were encouraged to come together in groups to

discuss challenges and build collaborative relationships. This activity set the tone with powerful reflections by everyone on their personal journeys, the gendered challenges they faced in professional work, and the strategies they used to carve out space for themselves.

Several recurring themes emerged during the discussion. Participants highlighted how leadership roles continue to be dominated by men and pointed to the persistent problem of workplace harassment. Others



the importance of pairing vision with strategy and building strong networks to enable long-term change. The event concluded with a sobering reminder: while this generation of women has grown up believing in empowerment and independence, systemic gaps—like weak maternity policies, wage inequality, and insufficient harassment protections—still limit women’s real agency. Considering these limitations, spaces like this networking event become a platform where women can come together, build collaborations, and offer mentorship.

The event created a vibrant, inclusive space to both celebrate achievements and acknowledge the structural barriers that remain. By centering diverse voices and shared experiences, the Annual Women Leaders Networking Tea reinforced a collective

commitment to gender equity, and inspired participants to continue pushing for a more inclusive and supportive future for all, while also making connections for future collaborations.

We are especially grateful to Ms. Ume Laila Azhar, Interim Chairperson of National Commission on the Status of Women in Pakistan for joining

us for the event. We are also grateful to our guests, Ms. Sarah Dawood, Ms. Sanam Kubra, Dr. Anoosh Wisal Khan, Dr. Saima Iqbal, Ms. Amneh Sheikh, Dr. Gul Khanda, Dr. Iram Rubab, Ms. Sadaf Rehman, Ms. Mehreen Shahid, Ms. Fatima Zaka, Ms. Hareem Sumbu Bari, and others for sharing their stories and for their time.



DIRECTOR ACHIEVEMENTS

FEATURED BY THE GATES FOUNDATION

Dr. Maryam Mustafa was featured by the Gates Foundation for her work on Awaz-e-Sehat, an accessible and affordable technology to help health workers detect pregnancy risks early and save the lives of mothers and babies.

Awaz-e-Sehat is a voice-assisted app designed specifically for frontline health workers. Using simple smartphones, the app guides providers through structured questions in local languages, helping them identify warning signs of conditions like pre-eclampsia or gestational diabetes during brief consultations. By capturing patient responses in real time and flagging potential risks, the tool supports more attentive, informed care—even in the most resource-strapped settings.





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