

Tying and Untying the Trouser-Cord: Dimensions of Normativity, Morality, and Emotion in Pakistani Body Behaviour

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This paper focuses on a study of the multi-functional trouser-cord (that ties traditional Pakistani trousers) and its connotations within the Islamic dress tradition as well as local concepts of the body. Comparable to the importance of belts and loincloths in other cultures of the Muslim, Christian, and Hindu world, the apparently simple and unpretentious drawstring plays a central role in the Pakistani discourse of chastity and desire. On the one hand the tying of the trouser-cord stands for the Muslim ideals of modesty and body control, but on the other the untying of the string refers to the dimension of emotion and sexuality where it can be strategically deployed as a medium of erotic play, allurements, and sensuousness. Thus, the trouser-cord is an item of clothing carrying ambiguous meanings, reflecting the tension and moral polarity between 'nomos' and 'eros'.

Keywords: Trouser-cord; Islamic dress; Pakistan; Chastity; Desire; Emotion; Sexuality; Modesty

Drawing on the ethnography of contemporary Pakistan and comparatively on other parts of the Muslim world, the present paper interprets aspects of the disciplined and the communicative body from the perspective of anthropology and Islamic studies. The body is conceptualised as a representation of moral norms and as sensual in its existential directness. According to the basic position of Islam as an all-encompassing system of meaning, which does not differentiate between the sacred and the profane, the body is also understood in religious terms. How the body is treated, and, for

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instance, covered and veiled, is laid down in the authoritative texts of the Qur'an and the *sunna* (normative practice) as well as in the *adab* (teachings on behavioural propriety): these represent an ideal, a paradigm for practical deeds and interactions. The question remains—how is the normative 'text' dealt with in social reality? How is the corpus of moral values and rules contextualised in practical life, that is, in personal everyday behaviour influenced by local traditions?

In the course of my interpretative approach, I have chosen the trouser-cord as a key to understand the body in its web of meaning within normativity, morality, and emotion. At face value, the cord or string for keeping the trousers is only a minor and insignificant accessory of traditional clothing.¹ But, within the anthropology of Pakistani dress, it has multiple functions. Which invisible meanings, derived from moral values and from emotion, are attributed to this cord? And in which contexts of action and communication are those meanings constituted? I argue that the trouser-cord represents a hinge between the biological body and the social being. It marks the boundaries of the body and serves to control sensuality, but at the same time it also refers to a morally shaky ground related to notions of sin and evil. Generally speaking, in the field of body decoration and fashion, clothing has an inherently ambiguous nature, answering to the dual demands of modesty and seductiveness. Thus, the trouser-cord not only ensures moral protection, but is also a mysterious means of communicating feelings of sexuality. In this context, it can be an accessory of erotic imagination as well as a concrete object of sexual allurements and erotic playfulness. Therefore, not without reason, the trouser-cord plays an important role in the discourse of chastity and desire within the context of local Muslim cultures, especially in Southwest Asia.

Apart from the consideration of textual, historical, and material culture sources, the empirical data on Muslim practices were collected in particular during periods of fieldwork in Pakistan and India. Before focusing on the dimensions of prescribed dress, morality, and eroticism within the frame of a synchronic-orientated study, it will be useful to introduce briefly the trouser-cord (and the belt) as a detail of male and female dress within a broader historical and ethnographic context.

The Material Culture of Chastity and Desire

Belt and Loincloth

Since antiquity, belts, waistbands, and sashes have been used to tie up flowing garments. In the Christian context, the belt of the priests, monks, and angels is a symbol of chastity, abstinence, and fidelity to God (Heinz-Mohr 1991, p. 130; Loschek 1993, p. 55). As a symbol of sexual purity, the belt divides the 'sinful' lower body and the 'spiritual' upper body. It is true that this projection of the ideas of 'good' and 'bad' on to the upper and the lower half of the body can often be found in the history of culture, but they do not appear to be universal. To protect oneself from a sinful sexual life became especially important for the Christian hermits.² In the so-called 'fraternities of the belt', such as the Augustinians and Franciscans, the friars

were given a consecrated belt during their ritual affiliation. Among Muslim guilds and dervish fraternities, the novice puts on a belt, loincloth, or trousers during his initiation (Taeschner 1979;³ Gramlich 1981, pp. 8–11, 85–7; cf. Nabhan 1994, pp. 70, 75; Frembgen 1999, pp. 16–18). They symbolise the extinction of desire in this life and are supposed to be guarded as an *amanat*, an article of property that is entrusted to one's safekeeping and must be defended. Within the *futuwwa* corporations of the Middle Ages, the wearing of trousers (*sarawil al-futuwwa*) and belt (*shadd*) were particularly important; in this context it is said that 'the genitals, which are placed between navel and knee, should be covered' and that 'the strongest desire comes through the genitals' (Taeschner 1979, pp. 162–3, 246–7, 334–5). The tying of the trousers is especially emphasised in order to protect oneself against committing adultery (*zina*). Likewise, the loincloth stands out as part of the dress of the Iranian Khaksar dervishes, an order explicitly called *silsila-i lungbandan* (lit. 'chain of the loincloth wearers'). The value of purity and consequently celibacy is similarly reflected in the importance of the loincloth (*langoti*, *kaupina*) as an essential symbol of ascetic identity in Hinduism. Indian *sadhus* and *sannyasis* wear loincloths made of cotton or of other vegetable fibres (Narayan 1989, p. 120).⁴ They are described as 'often just covering the penis and leaving the testicles exposed' (Gross 1979, p. 642), representing a kind of minimal clothing which underlines the commitment to an ascetic life of renunciation. Likewise, a Muslim *langotia faqir* in the Punjab is somebody who has made a vow of celibacy never to remove his loincloth.

As a means of ensuring morality through control of the body, belt and draped clothes, such as loincloth or waistcloth, are not only important for mystics and holy men, but also for the common people. In North India, for instance, the colloquial expression *langot band* (tightly bound loincloth) is used for a man of good character who controls his sexuality. Similarly, in Hindi *langoti ka pakka hona* means 'to fasten the loincloth', in the sense that it is done in a firm and solid (lit. 'cooked' and 'baked') way. Therefore, the South Asian *langoti* and the somewhat longer *dhoti* (Punj. *tehmat*) are wound around the waist with one end pulled through the legs and neatly tucked in at the back (Dar 1969, pp. 55, 58, 89–90; Tarlo 1996, p. 26; Askari & Arthur 1999, p. 74). The tightness of the tucking prevents the garment from falling down. The *lungi* or *lacha* is another uncut (predominantly male) loincloth (sometimes made of silk) wrapped around the waist and then tied by two or even three knots.

Coming back to the belt, a few examples will suffice to show that, also even further to the west in the Muslim world, sexual connotations are attached to this accessory. Among the Turks since earliest times, a high symbolic value was attributed to the bridal belt. For example, on the occasion of marriage, the father of the bride girdles his daughter with a special embroidered cloth belt (*kizlik kemeri*) and admonishes her not to disgrace the honour of her family. The belt, which is a token of the bride's virginity, is a family heirloom handed down to the daughters from generation to generation. Among the Alevi-Turkmen in Turkey, the bride wears a sash decorated

with cowries (to ward off the 'evil eye' and representing a symbol of fertility) as well as an additional belt with two round buckles (symbolising matrimony), which is given by the family of the bridegroom (Andrews 1985, p. 663; Loschek 1993, p. 56). In Tunisia, the bride's virginity is protected by a chain tied around her waist and closed by a padlock (Louis 1976, pp. 169–70). The broad belt of the Moroccan bride is ceremonially untied on the nuptial night to symbolise her willingness for sexual intercourse. As elsewhere in North Africa, she does not wear her belt again before the seventh day ('the day of the belt') after the wedding.⁵ Then a special ceremony, called *tahzim* ('putting on the belt'), marks the end of this potent period. Before the beginning of the twentieth century, in the area of Es-Salt in Jordan, women used to wear a special type of cloth belt fastened with about nine woven strings with tassels (Völger *et al.* 1987, p. 379). It is said that on the occasion of a pilgrimage, one of these strings was knotted to the railing of a saint's tomb that a wish (usually for the birth of a son) might be fulfilled. For the same reason, in the practical veneration of Muslim saints in the Maghrib, women sometimes deposit their belts at a shrine and put them on again before they leave.⁶

The ethnographic data presented above (which are, of course, not exhaustive with respect to the topic of symbolic ties) show that belt and loincloth can be understood as protective in a moral sense, ensuring purity and thus a strength-giving power, but also referring to fertility. The same holds true for another item of clothing explicitly related to sexuality, namely the somewhat more intimate trouser-cord. Already in the Abbasid period, Arabic strings were decorated with inscriptions of poetic, erotic, and even lewd character (Ibn al-Wašša 1984, pp. 157–8.) The drawstring is a sort of 'inner belt' that secures and holds up the loose trousers and thereby prevents them from falling down and exposing the wearer.

Trouser-Cord, the 'Inner Belt'

The use of baggy trousers (*shalwar, pajama*) as both a male and a female lower garment is common among Muslims in the Middle East and South Asia, especially in Pakistan, where it has become the national dress (Dar 1969, pp. 92–3; Taylor 1993, pp. 38, 41–2; Banerjee & Miller 2003, pp. 5, 238–48).⁷ Here the cord is part of a dress, *shalwar-qamiz* (trousers and knee-length tunic), originally coming from Iran where it is worn in regionally different styles. Similarly, *kurta-pajama* is the Indian Muslim dress. It is appropriate for a hot climate and allows the unhindered carrying out of the praying positions. Particularly within political Islamism, this type of dress has been labelled as 'Islamic'.

Following Muslim etiquette that clothing should conceal and not reveal the shape of the body (Shad 1985, pp. 13–20), the loose trousers are often voluminous, having a waist circumference three or four times the size of the wearer's waist. The many body-hiding folds are gathered by a cord slipped through the openings of the broad seam (*nefa*)⁸ at the trousers' tops and knotted at the front. In this way, the cord securely fastens the *shalwar* like a sort of 'inner belt', which is the equivalent of the

Turkish term *uçkur* used for this string.⁹ Ideas about modesty and the geometry of the body, prevalent in the subcontinent as well as in the Near and Middle East, require the covering of the zone of impurity between navel and knee in a twofold way—both with the trousers (always knotted above the navel) and with the knee-length tunic. The cord is of course absolutely necessary for these sorts of trousers, particularly as underwear (such as a loincloth) is usually not worn. While squatting on the floor to urinate or defecate—which, by the way, is called in Rajasthani *nalachhor*, ‘to loose the trouser-cord’—the long ends of the string are kept in the hands to prevent the trousers from falling down.

The cord is a narrow, loosely woven band of fine silk or cotton (in Northern Pakistan in former times made from wool; nomads in Baluchistan nowadays still use goat hair) with a length of about 170–230 cm. It is:

woven in the interlacing technique known as sprang, which produces a mesh-like textile, often with a diamond pattern formed of spaces in the weaving. The *izarband* is constructed by stretching the silk yarns over a wooden cross-piece, usually wedged across the frame of a *charpai* (bed), and manipulating the yarns into a mesh while keeping them separate by means of reed sticks. (Askari & Crill 1997, p. 91;¹⁰ cf. Yacopino 1987, p. 64; Frembgen 2001, pp. 41–2)

In villages the yarns are sometimes also tied at one end to a ring or hook, or whatever, on the ceiling. The importance of this technique (variously known as sprang, netting, or plaitwork) is that it produces a very elastic cord (Collingwood 1988, pp. 46–7).

Formerly, the most elegant trouser-strings were woven in the Punjab, especially in Lahore and Multan. Writing about the *patoli* or *ilakabandi* work of Lahore, Syad Muhammad Latif mentions ‘beautiful silk strings or girdles of drawers, with the long ends knotted off, and ending in ornamental tassels, ornamented with gold thread and beads’ (Latif 1995[1892], p. 262). The tassels and fringes made of gold thread are called *tilla*, *jhumka*, or in Pashto *zundhey*. Exquisite pieces for the wedding trousers come from Peshawar and from the area of the Khattak-Pakhtun in the North-West Frontier Province (NWFP). The strings of gold thread or silk are ingeniously twisted, resembling the ornamental tassels (*pirandah*) which women attach to their plaits of hair. In many rural areas of the NWFP, the trouser-cord is richly embellished with beautifully patterned glass beads and elaborate knots, turning it into a veritable small art object.¹¹ In the tribal area of Marwat, cords have even been seen decorated with triangular-shaped amulets woven with glass beads. Among the Baluch, dark-brown goat-hair strings are decorated at each end with a fine, elaborate tassel consisting of four stick-like square braids made of golden metal thread with additional glass beads and blue or green tinsel-tassels.¹² Homemade *nalas* from Sindh frequently have tassels with sequins and tinsel, glass beads, gold thread, and real rubies. In Afghanistan tiny metal beads are sometimes attached to the cord.

The meaning of this accessory is also highlighted by its sensually perceptible symbolism of colour. A more or less clear gender differentiation is shown by men

mostly wearing a white *nala* and women wearing a red or a multi-coloured one. White generally represents purity and peace; in Islam it is especially associated with the Prophet Muhammad who liked white (and green) clothes (Shad 1985, pp. 16–17).¹³ According to traditions collected by Ibn Majah, the Prophet gave the advice: ‘Wear white clothes because they are very clean and attractive.’ A second *hadith* (sayings of the Prophet) says: ‘Surely, the best dress in which you may meet Allah in your mosques and graves is a white dress.’ There are indications that these *hadith* were in practice interpreted as especially related to men (Krawietz 1991, p. 257). Finally, white is also the colour of the semen which complements the red female trouser-cord, a colour thought to be sexually suggestive. Red is associated with lifeblood, sexual potency, and fertility, that is with ‘danger’ (namely sully and impurity) as well as with ‘joy’. It is generally a colour having a stimulating effect on emotion (Classen 1993, p. 5). Following a widely applied thermally orientated classificatory system (used, above all, in folk medicine and derived from Galenic medicine), colours should also be in the right balance. In the present context, the white of the male semen has a ‘cooling’ effect, while the auspicious red colour of the female blood is considered extremely ‘hot’. Thus, the colours of the trouser-cord already indicate that human fertility must combine and balance these features of ‘hot’ and ‘cold’. In a broader sense, white is associated with the male sphere and red with the female world of wearing red clothes and applying red henna-paste during the marriage ritual in preparation for a period of life where procreation is most desired. Furthermore, multi-coloured, predominantly red threads play a conspicuous role in Punjabi marriage ceremonies and Bedouin women in Egypt wear red sashes around their waists (Werbner 1986, pp. 235–40; Rugh 1986, pp. 82, 84). Red also has an apotropaic value, warding off ghosts and demons thought to be created by God from the element of fire. Finally, the symbolic combination of white and red can be interpreted as the characteristic colours of matrimony.

In the urban culture of Pakistan, trouser-cords are nowadays mostly manufactured by men in factories and workshops, for instance in Karachi and Faisalabad. The *izar-band-wala*, or *nala-wala* is a hawker who sells the strings in the bazaar. At home, especially in the rural areas, the weaving (*band-bafi*) is still done by women, often belonging to low-class occupational groups. Additional embroidery and decoration, however, is a sort of ‘labour of love’ carried out by the mother for her son, the sister for her brother, or the wife for her husband. In some areas of Northern Pakistan (namely in Chitral, Gupis, and Punyal), I heard that the trouser-cord is also woven and decorated by a girl who presents it personally to her future husband before their marriage. It has to be added that this is usually done discreetly with the string placed into a folded embroidered handkerchief. In Mahal Kohistan, a hilly region of Sindh, it is the bridegroom’s father who gives his son a nicely decorated string (Adam Nayyar, pers. comm.).

To conclude this section on the material culture of the *nala* or *izar-band*, we have to mention the stick-like threading needle (German ‘Einziehstäbchen’ or ‘Einfädler’)

with which the string is slipped through the trousers' hem (Frembgen 2001, pp. 40–4). The small stick is either made of silver, iron, brass, wood, or plastic and has a loop at one end. It is called *nala-pani* in Urdu and Punjabi, *izar-band-kash* or *band-kash* in Persian, *parthoghakh-partau* or *parthoghakh-dakey* in Pashto, and *tuli* in Burushaski. Like the elaborately decorated trouser-cord, the threading needle is part of the trousseau.

Erotics and Intimacy

Tying the Trouser-Cord: The Dimension of Normativity and Morality

The trouser-cord is an essential and indispensable element of Islamic dress in West and South Asia: firstly, the use of the *izar*-band reflects moral ideas and ethical forms of conduct (*akhlaq*) as well as key values of everyday culture, such as honour and shame. Secondly, it involves important aspects of concrete behaviour in the field of manners, control of the body as flesh, and sexual practices. In Muslim societies, clothes are generally considered to be an extension of the body or a sort of 'second skin' (Eickelman 1984, p. 126; cf. Bianca 1991, p. 197). Consequently, in Pakistan (as elsewhere in the Muslim world), following Islamic prescriptions laid down in the *qur'an* (24/30–31; 33/59), *hadith*, works of *adab*, and local social morals, men and women should keep covered at all times those parts of their bodies which are called in Arabic '*awra*, a term with the connotation 'vulnerable'. The '*awra* of men is the area from the navel to just below the knees and for women the domain of '*awra* is the whole body (*jami' badaniha*) except her face, hands, and feet (following strict interpretation, sometimes even the voice is added) (Bousquet 1966, pp. 105, 184; Bouhdiba 1975, pp. 51–3, 204; Krawietz 1991, pp. 258, 281–2). The underlying concept of the *shari'a* (religious law) is to protect 'the integrity of the human body' (known as *hurma*). Originally, this rule of covering might have had something to do with the fear of demons connected with the orifices of the body. In practice, the trouser-cord is above all a male and female modesty garment; it connotes virginity and good character, especially for women. To be properly dressed according to the *qur'an* represents the outward sign of female modesty (*'izzat*) or sexual integrity which is defined as the men's honour (*ghairat*). The key term in this context is *satr al-'awra* or *satr-poshi* which means 'the guarding of the intimate parts' (which for women also includes drawing the head veil over their breasts).¹⁴ Therefore, women and men should do their best to safeguard *pakizgi* or to remain *pak-baz*, which means to be morally and spiritually 'pure', also with reference to dress and comportment.¹⁵ Maulana Ashraf 'Ali Thanawi, the author of the most important work of *adab* literature in modern times, preached a disciplined life of religious obligation and self-control, advocating the scripturalist norms of the *shari'a*. In his famous moral compendium *Bihishti Zewar*, he quotes the *hadith*: 'Many women wear clothes in name but in fact are naked. Such women will not go to paradise, nor will they even catch a whiff of its perfume' (Metcalf 1992, p. 211). A number of related

hadith refer to the disapproval of tight and transparent clothes (Madani 1998, pp. 74–6). The requirement of observing *satr* is also clearly expressed in the following *hadith* collected by Tirmizi: ‘Save yourself from nudity because two angels are with you all the time, except when you go to the toilet or engage in sexual intercourse; so, be bashful of them and respect their presence.’

In the language of symbols in Islam, the dialectical relationship between virtues and vices is transposed to parts of the body. Moral character and reason (*aql*) are thought to be placed in the head, whereas the *nafs al-ammarah*, that is, the urging or demanding soul which is connected with passion and desire, is situated in the loins. The lowest value is attributed to the feet. Within Sufism the moral conflict between *aql* and *nafs* is fought as an inner *jihad* (struggle). As far as the differentiation of gender in the male perspective of everyday culture is concerned, men are said to have *aql*—intellect, whereas women embody the undisciplined impulses of the *nafs*—emotion and sexuality. Following this dichotomous folk construction, based on naturalistic, reductionist views of the body, women are considered by men to be sexually wild, dangerously promiscuous, and therefore easy to seduce. Moreover, viewed as being closer to nature than to culture, they are thought to be less guided by reason and to have less control over their ‘unstable’ bodily functions (referring, for example, to menstruation). Provocative or improper female dressing is therefore interpreted as a positive signal and likely to arouse sexual temptation (*fitna*). According to the *hadith* collected by al-Bukhari, women represent the greatest *fitna*, a dangerous, destructive emotion which threatens order and stability. Particularly seen from the rigid perspective of Islamists, men should domesticate the expressive activities of their women in order to avoid adultery, that is, they should be watchful that women cover their sources of charm and under no circumstances expose themselves. This strict practice of interpreting verses from the Qur’an referring to the control of emotion is also reflected in proverbial expressions suggesting that the trouser-cords of their wives is most dear to men. It is even reported that in the Mughal period an officer used to seal the trouser-cords of his women before he left for the court, but out of vexation the ladies soon killed him (Annemarie Schimmel, pers. comm., letter dated 3 April 2000).

The language of Islamic dress consequently comprises fixed grammatic rules, which mean that a morally immaculate and virtuous behaviour is achieved through carefully knotting the trouser-cord. Similarly, loosely flowing hair is bound—bound hair being a general symbol of the control of female chastity in Muslim societies. In education, girls and boys are advised to pay attention to the correctly bound cord. Maulana Thanawi notes in the Tenth Book of his *Bihishti Zewar*: ‘Do not come out of the privy or bathroom tying your belt, but tie it carefully before coming out’ (Metcalf, 1992, p. 336).¹⁶ Such body management norms are adopted at a subconscious level, becoming an internalised way of correct behaviour in everyday life.

Proverbs and sayings recommending modesty in dress and comportment reflect the moral responsibility of the individual for his body seen from the emic perspective of Muslim cultures. They are closely related to *taqwa*, a central *Qur’anic* concept

mostly translated as 'piety', which implies the meaning of care, fear of God, and protecting oneself against the forbidden and sinful. Hence such proverbs are a direct manifestation of the normative concept of *'awra*; they contain cultural rules of emotion whose application in concrete actions is observable. Depending on the specific context and speech situation, they are strategically used in everyday interactions among adults and between adults and children to refer to correct outer behaviour. In the course of fieldwork in Indo-Pakistan, I recorded expressions and phrases from the moral use of language among speakers of Urdu, Hindi, Punjabi, Pashto, Persian, and Burushaski. A further source were dictionaries of local languages. These idiomatic formulas and expressions containing rules, advice, and references constitute 'practical texts' in the sense of Foucault who emphasised their 'etho-poetic' function (Foucault 1986, pp. 20–1). Generally, such proverbs say that a person should exercise self-control and avoid sin. In Punjabi the expression *nale da pakka hona*, in Urdu *nale ka pakka hona* (lit. 'for the cord to be tight'), means that a person should take care of his trouser-cord, that is, he should control himself and guard his moral purity. Similarly, in Pakhtun culture, where honour is of utmost importance, we find several sayings like: *baga chatha ne spachdal* in the sense of the injunction 'you should not dare to open your trouser-cord in front of anyone'. In everyday speech this saying is used in a modified way in sentences like: *hagha da bage na dair teeng de*—'He does not open his trouser-cord to anyone', that is 'he is not a person of easy virtue'. A very common Pashto proverb runs: *baga de sanbale satha*—'Always keep hold of your trouser-cord in a safe place', that is 'it should be properly secured by knots'. This could have been said, for instance, in former times, by a Pakhtun lady bidding farewell to her husband when he was about to leave for Hindustan to work for a long period as a horse-trader or sword-seller. In this way she expressed her trust (*yaqin*, *bharosa*) that her husband would remain faithful (*ba-wafa*) to her. Matrimonial fidelity (*wafadari*) is highly valued in Islam, as, for example, in the very popular legend of Yusuf and Zuleikha (also mentioned in Sura 12 of the Qur'an), the point of which is that Yusuf safeguarded his chastity despite the repeated advances of the enticing Zuleikha, Potiphar's beautiful wife. The enlightening quality of proverbs became especially apparent to me when I recorded my first saying on the trouser-cord in February 1995 in Jodhpur (Rajasthan). It runs in Hindi: *ghore ki tang aur admi ka ling bandha hi chahie* (or... *bandhe rahna chahie*) meaning 'the penis (which is guarded by the *pajama*-string) should be as securely fastened as the leg of the horse (by a bridle)'. A well-knotted trouser-cord proves that a person is disciplined and not of easy virtue. It has already been shown that this is also of crucial importance for mystics and ascetics. The Chishti-Sufi Hamid ud-Din Savali Nagauri (d. 1274) reportedly reprimanded his pleasure-seeking former companions, who tried to encourage him to return to a sinful life, saying: 'Go and sit in a corner, for I have tied up my pyjama-cord so tight that I shall not even open it for the houris on the morrow of the Resurrection' (Currie 1989, p. 57).

Knots generally stand for responsibility. Among Punjabis, the expression 'tying the knots (around one's neck)' means to be bound by responsibilities, as when, for

instance, a married couple forms an independent household (Eglar 1960, p. 87). The years of ‘untying the knots’, however, refer to the discharge of obligations when children are married off. Returning to the subject of dress, the *izar-band* is, like any other thread, belt, or chain, essentially a line that should be unbroken. It represents a protective ring around the body, which is—similar to the magic of the knot—thought to ward off evil. The knot in the trouser-cord has a special meaning: as a reinforcement of the ‘bond of love’, it symbolises an ‘oath of fidelity’ and therefore serves chastity and purity. In the context of sexual behaviour and of relieving oneself, the knot appears as a functional obstacle, as something to be unfastened. According to René Guénon, it could be generally said that ‘it is the knot which maintains the being in the state in question, and that its “undoing” immediately brings about the being’s death to that state’ (1995, p. 277). A ‘vital knot’ is consequently a point of operation of forces, whereby the state of a bond or even a fetter can be transformed and dissolved within a moment.¹⁷

In order to be protected from threats to their reputation and honour, women in Pakistan (particularly in the NWFP) often tie up their trouser-cords with two or three knots (*pakki ganth*), while in Afghanistan they allegedly use four to five. Men often content themselves with a slip-knot, which is not such a clear sign of resistance. Among the Pakhtun, Northern Punjabi, Kashmiri, or the mountain peoples of Northern Pakistan, when a couple is going to consummate their marriage on the nuptial night, the mother of the bride secures the trousers of her virgin daughter with a complicated series of knots, sometimes up to 10–15 knots on top of each other. As Adam Nayyar reported from Astor valley (Northern Areas), these knots—called *mulai-gund* (woman’s knot)—are a women’s secret and very difficult to open (Nayyar 1986, pp. 67–8). While the shamefaced bride either remains completely passive or tries to squirm, the young man has to struggle hard to open the knots or to tear up the silken cord in the darkness. Often, when his patience is wearing thin, he finally cuts the trouser-cord with a knife. A Punjabi friend told me that, according to an old tradition, the way the bridegroom opens the string is thought to reveal his (bad) character. If the man carefully unties the knots, he is considered to be an intriguer; if he tears the string up by sheer force, he must be cruel; and if he cuts it with his knife, he is supposed to be stupid.¹⁸

It is considered dishonourable (*be-sharm*) and immodest (*be-satr*) if the ends of the trouser-cord are visible from under the shirt, particularly in the presence of elders. In the Punjab, one makes fun of such a person and derides him by remarking that his *tisri lat* (third leg) is visible. Among the Pakhtun he would be severely reprimanded and told to take the cord and tie it properly (*parthoghakh uchut ka*). Mohajir and Gujarati people in Karachi claim that they would tie the string in such a way that the ends would be much shorter than, for instance, in the Punjab. In inter-ethnic joking and mockery, Punjabi are generally criticised for the long, dangling ends of their trouser-cords. Pakhtun and Tajik in Afghanistan told me that it would be simply unthinkable to imagine a visible *izar-band* which could attract the amorous eye. If this happened among a circle of friends, one of them would seize the cord,

show it around and rudely demand that, on account of such a lack of modesty, the careless person should entertain all his friends at his own expense. Apparently, this rarely happens in Afghanistan because men and women wear the string partly stuffed inside the trousers. Despite the above-mentioned accusations of immodesty among different ethnic groups in Pakistan, the habit of hiding the ends of the *izar-band* is found not only in the NWFP (the region bordering Afghanistan), but also in the Punjab (for instance, reported from Sayyid families) and other parts of the country. Of course, it always depends on how morality is conveyed through education within a given family. Usually, the ends and loops of the cord are taken with both hands in a characteristic gesture and stuffed behind the seam. Inside the trousers, they are allowed to hang down so far that they should not touch the genitalia (however, in fact, they often do).

Untying the Trouser-Cord: The Dimension of Emotion

A rare pictorial carpet from Iran shows a scene with Sheikh San'an, a famous Sufi, which is based on a tale written by the mystic Farid ud-Din 'Attar (d. 1220) and well known throughout the Muslim world. The main topic is the ardent and yearning love of the *sheikh* for a Christian maiden, his submission to work even as a herdsman for her pigs, and his final repentance and return to a faithful, pious life. An extraordinary erotic scene in the centre of the carpet depicts how the Sufi opens the trouser-cord of the woman who is holding a carafe of wine (Schlamminger & Wilson 1980, pp. 54–6, 72–3).¹⁹ The same theme can be found in Indian miniature paintings showing dallying couples, but always the male lover takes the initiative to undress his female consort who shamefully bows her head (Stronge 1999, pp. 112).²⁰ Similarly, in the obscene 'moral climate' of contemporary Pashto 'blue movies', it is always women who are shown naked—never men. The traumatic experience of rape, however, is reflected in Saadat Hasan Manto's (1912–55) short story 'Khol do' (Loosen up), a title referring to the command to loosen up the cord and to pull down the trousers (Ratan 1989, p. 92).

This dimension of sexual behaviour is reflected in the Muslim world in the medium of an elaborate language paraphrasing the meaning and role of the trouser-cord. Already in 1886 the Dutch Arabist Christiaan Snouk Hurgronje collected in Mecca the rude and insulting proverb *ya mefkuket ed-dikkeh*—'Oh thou, whose trouser-cord is going to be opened' (Snouk Hurgronje 1886, p. 89, n. 2). Proverbs collected in South and West Asia deal with the opposite of the control of emotion, namely with a loose character who is unable to bridle his sexuality. Thus, in Urdu, the opposite of body control—*nale ka pakka hona*—is *nale ka kachcha hona*. Both terms, *pakka* ('cooked', 'baked') and *kachcha* ('raw', 'unbaked'), are taken from culinary and constructional language focusing, on the one hand, on the 'bound' and 'solid', on 'fidelity', and, on the other hand, on giving way to the instincts of the lower soul (*nafs*), implying 'loosening' and 'infidelity'. In Hindi *langot ka kachcha* is literally an 'uncooked loincloth', a term used for a lewd, promiscuous man

(Narayan 1989, p. 121). Somebody who ‘opens his trouser-cord for everyone’, which corresponds to the Punjabi saying *nare da bara tela owe*, is obviously a person who cannot control his *nafs*, that is his lower and animal self. He yields to the undisciplined sinful impulses of his *nafs*. A man would also be called *izar-band ka dhila* (a libidinous man, a debauchee), derived from *dhil*—‘the state of being loose’—or more poetically ‘*ashiq-mizaj* (a womaniser), unworthy of trust (*be-wafa*). Referring to women, the Pashto saying *baga har chatha peranzy thal*—‘She is opening her trouser-cord to everyone’—means a prostitute, and *izar-band ki dhili* in Urdu simply means ‘a woman of easy virtue’. Nevertheless, in daily discourse in Indo-Pakistan, proverbs and sayings of that kind are mostly used while talking about men. In the Turkish language similar expressions almost always refer to men: *uçkuruna düskün* means somebody who cannot control himself, who is addicted to chasing after women, and *uçkuru gerşek* means somebody who keeps his ‘inner belt’ loose.

In Pakistan, the way of wearing traditional dress and particularly the trouser-cord offers a range of behaviour, from charm to explicit affront observable in everyday behaviour, as by ‘village Romeos’ who try to entice women to sit in body postures where their splendidly decorated trouser-cords are intentionally visible from under their shirts. Sometimes they even play with both of their tassels to make a show of their physical attraction. When I frequently saw these tassels with pendants in remote parts of Indus Kohistan, their form often reminded me of testicles and seed-threads. This erotic dimension becomes clear if we imagine the appearance of the *lala* (lit. ‘big brother’), that is, the urban dandy (who could be seen in Peshawar until the 1960s and 1970s), and his image construction through a particular way of dressing. He would come to amuse himself in public parks and gardens, for instance in Shahi-bagh, arriving in a beautifully decorated *tanga* (horse-carriage). The *lala* would wear a white *latha-shalwar*, made of cotton, and a cream-coloured (*boski*) silken *qamiz*. The end of his grey silk turban would hang down to his left knee. On that side he also wore a dagger in his belt. Finally, on the right side, the ends of the trouser-cord with their elaborately decorated pendants would be provocatively draped hanging down to the knee. In Lahore, the *phund* (lit. yellow hornet), that is, a stud or player, would roughly correspond to the Peshawari *lala*.

These examples show that pieces of dress (like the trouser-cord) are ‘a flexible medium people manipulate to project the kind of public image they want others to know them by’ (Rugh 1986, p. 3). Nevertheless, as a ‘text’, the visibility of the string in the public space can be ‘read’ differently and therefore carries an ambiguous meaning: does the person want to communicate an erotic signal or not? Within the temporal chain of cause and effect, the receiver of the signal can never be sure if the cord is just accidentally visible, out of negligence, or provocatively displayed implying an exhibitionistic urge. This ambiguity is also found, probably to a somewhat lesser extent, within the intimacy of legal sexuality lived by a married couple, where the revealing of the trouser-cord may convey erotic fancies and expectations. A closer look in relevant dictionaries brings a number of idiomatic expressions to light which show clear sexual connotations (Fallon 1989[1879], pp. 79–80;

Platts 1997[1884], p. 45; Steingass 1984[1892], p. 43). Thus, *izar-bandi rishta* denotes in Persian ‘a connection through a wife or mistress’. In Urdu *izar-band pe hath dalna* means ‘to lay one’s hand on the strings of (a woman’s) trousers’, that is, to contemplate sexual intercourse. Conversely, the situation of a prostitute who has no customers knocking at her door is described as *izar-band na kholna*—literally ‘not to let down one’s trousers’, meaning ‘not to sleep with a client’.

Furthermore, in Persian love poetry we find a revealing verse in Jami’s *Salaman va Absal* which is part of his opus *Haft aurang* (‘seven thrones’). Thus, the Herati poet of the fifteenth century (d. 1492) wrote:

*be har sauda’i ke darsar dashtand—parde-ye sharm az mian bar dashtand
shod goshude dar mian bandi ke bud—sahtar shod meyl-e peyvandi ke bud.*

Because of the passion they felt, they lifted the ‘slave of passion’ (that is, the trousers). ‘The band, which was around the waist, was opened/and the inclination that existed, became stronger.’

From Insha (1756–1818), a well-known poet at the court of the Nawab in Lucknow (North India), we know the verse:

Do not give a memento to Insha, before you know, he’ll put out the cord of your pyjamas. (Hasan 1990, p. 181)

Likewise Bahadur Singh Bahadur addressed the famous courtesans of Lucknow with the erotic verse:

Hither the *choli* (bodice) is torn at seams,
thither the knots are untied.
Who knows who plundered this splendour
throughout the night. (Hasan 1990, p. 180)

In the twentieth century Manto described an erotic scene in his short story ‘Odour’; referring to the female lover, he observed:

Her silk *salwar* lay on the other bed, one end of its deep red cord dangling from the bed.

Her other garments were also lying on the same bed—a flamboyant red *kameez* with golden flowers imprinted on it, her brassiere, undergarment and *dupatta*, all of them bridal red, and scented with henna. ...When Randhir had unfastened her tight brassiere, he noticed it had left tell-tale marks on her breasts and back. The cord of her *salwar* had also eaten into her flesh at the waist in the form of a heavy streak of red. (Ratan 1989, pp. 156–7)

Admittedly, in contemporary Pakistani gender relations, as elsewhere in the Muslim world, an open expression of love and attachment in the presence of others is not approved. In the Punjab, a woman cannot even sit with her husband on the same *charpoy* (string cot). Likewise, in marital intimacy (*qurbat*) as well as in the realm of amorous pleasures, there are only rare moments of privacy for man and wife. Intercourse therefore often seems to be a short act devoid of much warmth and tenderness, usually in the darkness, rarely undisturbed by other family members sleeping in the same room. Sometimes the darkness of a moonless night protects the lovers who meet out in a maize field. Similarly, erotic tenderness can hardly develop

in the nuptial night where usually two complete strangers meet for the first time. It is said that in many cases the bride is brutally raped. At least sometimes, for the first period of marriage, young couples are provided with an enclosed private space, such as, for example, the summer room on the upper storey of the house in Hunza (Karakoram/Northern Pakistan).

For the sexual act, the trouser-cord is untied, but the trousers are mostly not taken off. Social notions of *sharm*, that is feelings of shyness, modesty, and shame, are strong and man and wife usually do not completely undress. Complete nakedness is generally held in abhorrence following the well-known *hadith* reported by Ibn Majah: 'Nudity has been denounced to the extent that a husband and wife, even while having intercourse, have been asked to observe the etiquette of *satr* and not to be completely naked like donkeys.' Likewise sexual wishes and expectations are not verbally expressed. However, sexuality in marriage is viewed positively by the Qur'an and a *hadith* says: 'The best wife is the one who protects her chastity and is sensually fond of her husband.' Normative statements vary among different schools of religious law as to whether a married couple may look at each other's body during the sexual act or not (cf. Bousquet 1966, pp. 104–6, 184; Omar 1989, p. 54). Nevertheless, the model of the Prophet is clear in the saying: 'Aisha stated that the Prophet never looked at her private parts nor did she look at his.'

Although in a number of cases, for instance in the Punjab, among the Pakhtun (*landai*-poetry) and in Rajasthan, women's oral traditions invoke a rich imagination of romantic, sexually playful, and exuberant women, this does not represent a direct key for the understanding of actual sexual behaviour. To a certain extent, these songs and stories 'about flirtation, enticement, erotic bites, exciting entanglements' (Gold 1994, p. 40) with an illicit lover, which are performed on prescribed ritual occasions, might reflect experiences from adulterous liaisons; however, generally speaking, they have to be interpreted as a 'culture of resistance' or as 'rituals of rebellion' in Gluckman's terms (Werbner n.d., p. 3).

In real life, eroticism can develop only in a more refined atmosphere: it depends on the couple if they prefer complete darkness or if a candle or oil-lamp is allowed to burn, if they perfume their bodies before the act, take some sweets together and so on. Either out of modesty or to tease or excite her husband (or lover) a woman may tie her trouser-cord with a number of knots, which he would have to untie. Sublime forms of promise and luring, withholding, and teasing in such foreplay situations work as a powerful stimuli; in this way the handling of the *izar-band* is something like a capricious detour to fulfil erotic desire. Similar to the use of the European 'chastity belt', which originated in the fifteenth century in Florence, it obviously enhances male lust to open something apparently well locked up. In any case, the *nala* represents an obstacle that has to be overcome, a boundary that has to be crossed before being naked and ready for intercourse. Usually the man unties the string; only rarely, in a very relaxed and trusting relationship, the woman may open the knots herself. This active versus passive/shy behaviour also reflects gender differences in a sexual 'temperament' culturally determined by Islam.

But, in spite of ‘village Romeos’, dandies, and an occasional candle in the bedroom, the question remains as to why the trouser-cord is sometimes turned into such an intricately decorated object of erotic art, if, in most circumstances, it is not visible at all. As a rule, in daily behaviour, people try their best not to expose the string. Thus, most of the time the *nala* represents an accessory of erotic imagination, a stimulus for fancies when secretly touched under the shirt. At best in the male world of *hujras* (men’s houses) in the NWFP and Punjab, where male–male sexuality plays a role, the boundaries of shame are somewhat lowered. Here it may happen, as I learnt from friends, that a young man would throw open his *qamiz* proudly displaying his beautiful trouser-cord, obviously as an enticement for the yet concealed penis. Nevertheless, in male–female sexuality too, looking at and touching the string is an important stimulus and drive of the libido.

Similarly in the realm of mockery, sayings and narratives frequently focus on the trouser-cord, for instance among the arch enemies of Hunza and Nager in the Karakoram. Thus, the people of Hunza contemptuously depict the neighbouring Nagerkuts as lascivious, dirty, and lazy (Frembgen 1983, 1992). In one of these mocking narratives the Hunzukuts assert that in the winter months men and women in Nager would not perform the compulsory major ablution (*ghusl*) after the sexual intercourse. Being lazy and negligent, they would avoid coming out from under their blankets to take a bath in the freezing cold where icy water first has to be heated. Instead they would simply make a knot in their string as a mnemonic aid to make up the omission with the ablutions in the forthcoming summer (provided that the cord would be long enough for all the knots).²¹ In summer they would then untie the knots and perform the ablutions one after another.

Finally, it has to be mentioned that the worst insult is to untie somebody’s trouser-cord forcefully in public. To strip a person of his trousers and to expose his nakedness is the biggest disgrace imaginable. The Pashto saying *da cha bagay tha las achawal* means the threat to take off somebody’s trouser-cord. It can be related to the Burushaski comparison: *asa khiine yuuwe yuucim gupalting deegusum juwan*—‘Like the young thief who took off his father’s trousers’ (Tiffou 1993, p. 111, no. 4001). It is significant that this saying, which is based on an anecdote, sheds light on the way Hunza women sometimes fight among themselves: when they quarrel and come to blows, they specially try to open the trouser-cord of the opponent in order to disgrace her. In a particular case from Hunza, one of the male bystanders threw his coat over the dishonoured naked lady, out of shame.

Conclusion

Apart from the obvious practical functionality of the trouser-cord,²² the ethnographic data presented above show how, within an Islamic dress tradition, an item of clothing can convey messages about normative expectations, morality, and individual emotional style. The string represents the centre of the body topography; it embodies a borderline, namely the place where upper and lower body meet each other.

Insights gained through the study of verbal arts (particularly moralising proverbs) as well as the observation of personal demeanour revealed a basic ambiguity. On the one hand, the tying of the *izar-band* reflects the ideal model of modest comportment and disciplined control of the body. It is done carefully by women and men because of the moral fear of losing their virtue. Nevertheless, the male-dominated moral system appears to be specially focused on the control of the female body—seen as the medium for emotion and sexual activity, whereas men seem to be bound to morals to a lesser degree. Based on naturalistic views of the body, this implies asymmetrical sexual behaviour of men and women legitimising social inequalities.

Following Islamic rules of appropriate dress as well as social morals of honour and shame, the trouser-cord should be an invisible part of the clothed, covered body. Within the context of the normative system of Islam, a visible *izar-band* changes the code of information of the dress. It is considered to be indecent, immodest, offensive, sinful, and virtually ‘unimaginable’ because it does not correspond to the presentation of the public self. On the whole, it stands for passion and desire, that is, for the material and satanic elements of the soul. Here the notion of visibility combined with the close physical association of the trouser-cord with the genitals and hence with copulation appear as a strong metonymic symbol. On the other hand, the string is used metaphorically as a euphemistic image of lived sexuality and eroticism. In this way, a visible *izar-band* remains ambiguous, enigmatic, and part of an aesthetic mode of communication.²³

Consequently, the meaning attributed to this visual message within the respective dialogical context of action depends on further components of non-verbal communication (such as facial expressions, gestures, movements). The individual way of wearing the trouser-cord can ‘reveal or conceal’, incite lust or shame. This factor either corresponds to the traditional, internalised modesty values, collectively shared by the members of the Muslim *umma* (community), which find their expression in an ideal Islamic code of dress, or it represents a key element of individual flirtatious behaviour. In short, the trouser-cord reflects the tension between ‘nomos’ and ‘eros’ and embodies a moral polarity. Within the erotic sphere, the trouser-cord shows what possibilities for individual expression are inherent in such an apparently simple and unpretentious item of clothing. When its visibility is strategically deployed, it can become a medium of erotic play and sensuousness. Simply through tying or untying a knot, the wearer may transgress a border and go from puritanical covering to nakedness. The act of untying is sexually transgressive and symbolises the dissolution of the normatively high anchored bonds of shame.

It is because of its (one-sided) modesty connotations that in Muslim societies (where—as in Pakistan—desire so to speak breaks through the system of order) such a sexually powerful thing as the trouser-cord could remain unlicensed. The same holds true, by the way, for the veil (*dupatta*) and the shawl (*orhni*), which not only serve women for covering according to the rigid Islamic dress code, but also beautify and serve as an erotic accessory (a French *dessous*). As a medium of self-representation such a wrap ‘enhances and subtly reveals its wearer’s charms, enticing rather than

cutting off male gazes' (Gold 1994, p. 48). Physical attractiveness is after all important in finding a suitable marriage partner. Concerning wrap imagery in Rajasthani women's lore, Gold adds: 'wraps can also unwrap; from the women's perspective, poses of sexual modesty and reticence can readily flow into allurements, involvement, and manipulation' (1994, p. 52). In India, the same holds true for women's fiddling with the *pallu*, that is, the free end of the draped *sari*, used for veiling the body as well as exposing it.²⁴ This ambiguity, with which contexts of action can be 'read', also shows that the discourse does not remain coherent, but appears rather broken and heterogeneous.

In the Muslim world, where body and dress are structured by the normative religious order of Islam and resulting social modesty codes, erotics and intimacy generally remain within the limits of a private and protected space. But also this domain is affected by modern change. In Pakistan and other parts of South, West, and Central Asia, the trouser-cord is definitely a traditional accessory of dress carrying meaning with respect to moral behaviour; yet nowadays, in the cities, a modern band of elastic regularly substitutes for it. The elastic is an undifferentiated object because there is nothing to tie or to untie. Also global lifestyles might gradually erode Muslim notions of appropriate dress, at least among people of the upper strata of society. The adoption of Western-style dress, for example, of suit and tight-fitting jeans, which marks a change of status, represents a serious conflict of social norms and values, particularly to defenders of traditional morality, who condemn this clothing as body exposing and therefore un-Islamic.

Notes

Practical behaviour which shows strong emotional or 'intimate' components, such as sexuality, is usually rather difficult to observe and to document (cf. Bousquet 1966, p. 184; Duerr 1990, 138–9). In Pakistani everyday culture, the trouser-cord is such an intimate object that its local name is considered almost 'unspeakable'. Related practices with their tacit knowledge appear as part of a hidden world.

During a period of about eight years (in the course of nine field trips to Pakistan, four to India, and others to the Middle East), I collected statements, opinions, reflections, personal narratives, reports of personal experiences, and so on, and made a number of observations on the topic in question. I am particularly grateful to several dear male and female friends in Pakistan (who wish to remain anonymous) for their long-standing trust and their most valuable contributions, conversations, and discussions. In Europe, I had the chance to discuss the material with Renate Syed (Munich), the late Annemarie Schimmel (Bonn), a number of Pakistani friends, as well as with the participants in the 15th Pakistan Workshop held in Rook How, Lake District, England (5–7 May 2000) where a preliminary draft of this paper was presented first. Finally, I should like to thank Pnina Werbner (Manchester) and Aasim Akhtar (Islamabad) for their sustained interest in this paper, their careful readings, and helpful suggestions.

[1] So far, the trouser-cord as an item of clothing has been largely overlooked in studies on material culture. In a more recent comprehensive work on the meaning and importance of dress in India titled *Clothing Matters* (Tarlo 1996) not a single piece of information is given on the trouser-cord. Likewise in a volume on the *Languages of Dress in the Middle East*, the string

is mentioned only once in passing without any notion of its meaning (Lindisfarne-Tapper & Ingham 1997, p. 74).

- [2] But comparative meanings and uses of belts and strings are also found in Hinduism. Part of the *upanayana* ritual of the twice-born is, for instance, the girdling of the boy with a special holy grass (*darbha*) consisting of three strings (Dubois 1994[1906], pp. 181, 186). In this way, the body of the chaste *brahmacarin* is symbolically separated into two pieces: the upper part (head and heart) should study the Veda, whereas the lower, impure part is reserved for excretions.
- [3] See index—*shadd*, trousers of the *futuwwa*
- [4] In her chapter on ‘Loincloth and celibacy’, Kirin Narayan, for instance, mentions ascetics wearing, in similar fashion to the European ‘chastity belt’, ‘a wooden belt several inches thick and locked with brass hinges (*kathiya babas*), and ascetics who live encased in metal loincloths of iron, steel, or brass’ (1989, p. 120).
- [5] According to religious law, the bride has the right to share her husband’s bed every night during the first seven days of their marriage (Omar 1989, p. 48; cf. Spring & Hudson 1995, p. 76; Kammerer-Grothaus 1995, p. 6, cf. 35, 38 (nos. 31–2); Chebel 1997, p.163). In another context, among the Berber tribe of the Ulad Bu ‘Aziz, the belt of a woman symbolises a shameful submission and pledge. It is said that:

if a sheikh or governor wants to extract money from one of his subjects and the latter takes refuge in the tent of some important person who happens to be away from home, the wife of the absent host takes off her belt (*hzäm*) and gives it to the refugee, who goes with it to the sheikh or governor. This is ‘*ar* [shame; author’s note] on the part of the wife, and one-half of the claim will be remitted in consequence. (Westermarck 1926, p. 521)

- [6] This happens, for example at the shrines of the Algerian saints Sidi Bu ‘Abdallah in Quarizane and Lalla Setti in Tlemcen (Dermenghem 1954, pp. 99, 129, 133). In a similar context, Algerian Berber women of Greater Kabylia, who suffer from infertility, fasten their belt for a certain time to the main horizontal beam of the home (Neumann 1983, p. 93). They do so to charge it so to speak with the power of fertility embodied in this part of the domestic architecture considered to symbolise the male principle and to be associated to the activities of the sky.
- [7] In India *shalwar-qamiz* has nowadays become a modern functional garment particularly accepted by young women.
- [8] In Pashto this tube-like seam is called *bada* or *da bagay tilay*.
- [9] In Muslim countries in South, West, and Central Asia, the trouser-cord is known by different names:

Urdu	<i>izar-band, nala/nara</i>	Arabic	<i>dikkeh, dekkah</i>
Hindi	<i>nala/nala</i>	Persian	<i>izar-band</i>
Punjabi	<i>nala/nara</i>	Tajik	<i>ezar, ezar-band</i>
Hindko	<i>nara</i>	Turkish	<i>uçkur</i>
Gujerati	<i>naro</i>	Turkmen	<i>urguch</i>
Pashto	<i>parthoghakh, бага</i>	Uighur	<i>ishtan-bagh</i>
Burushaski	<i>ghaski</i>		

Interestingly the homonymous expression *nala/nara* is also the term for a water channel, a rivulet, and the umbilical cord; in Hindi the navel-string is called *nal*. This homonym might provide a hint as to why in the Mewar region of Rajasthan a trouser-cord is used during the magic healing of stomach pain (*gola-ruti*). It was explained to me that a female healer diagnoses that the navel has somewhat been displaced. For the treatment the patient first has to lie down on the floor. Then she takes a *nara*, ties one end around the patient’s toe and takes the other one in her hand, reciting special *mantras* (sacred formulas).

- [10] See p. 53 (ill. no. 90), p. 95 (ill. no. 152), p. 96 (ill. nos 153, 154).
- [11] Woven leather-strings with especially attached decorative knots, tassels, and branchings are also used as trouser-cords by the inhabitants of the Western Sahara/Mauretania (Creyaufmüller 1983, p. 299).
- [12] I would like to express my thanks to my colleague Margaret Mills (Columbus, OH) for the chance to see her collection and to discuss this topic with her.
- [13] Concerning the symbolism of white and red see, for example, Burkhart (1985), Frembgen (1987, p. 112; 1994, p. 412).
- [14] *Satr* also means 'to shield', 'to cover', 'to protect', and 'to veil' (El Guindi 1999, p. 88).
- [15] They wish the same for their children. This is probably the reason why parents offer a trouser-cord at the shrine of the famous saint Mui'n ud-Din Chishti (1142–236) at Ajmer Sharif (Rajasthan) when their son is about 3 or 4 years old (Currie 1989, p. 133).
- [16] As a matter of fact, in cities there are areas of ill repute around brothels where people feel less constricted by moral rules. For example, in Lahore's Hira Mandi also in the daytime one can see men wearing only trousers and no shirt and, as Mohsin Hamid observed, in the night-time customers in the dark alleys may openly fasten their trouser-cord with both hands (Hamid 2000, p. 49).
- [17] For an account on the symbolism of the knot, see Coomaraswamy (1944) and Guénon (1995, pp. 277–8).
- [18] This aspect of female bodily modesty is also highlighted in other Muslim wedding ceremonies where knots and belts relate to virginity and fertility. Thus, with reference to the Sudanic town of Omdurman, we learn that:

the bride was wrapped in strips of material tightly knotted together round her waist and hips over her clothes. The groom was obliged to untie the knots on the evening of the seventh day after the marriage ceremony, the bride all the while attempting to stop him. The meaning here is twofold: the knots served as a physical as well as symbolic obstacle to the consummation of the marriage. The bride in her attempts to resist these advances was protecting her virginity and thus preserving her honour. (Spring & Hudson 1995, p. 73)

In Morocco, the bridegroom has to undo seven knots before consummating the marriage. Thus, Edward Westermarck reported from Andjra in Morocco:

the bridegroom, before he can have intercourse with the bride, must untie seven knots which have been made in the cord (*tsekka*) of her drawers by her *haddäyin*, or women attending her. This 'tying up' of the bride may be, or may have been, a shame attempt to protect the bride by laying obstacles in the bridegroom's way, or a means of protecting the bride from being by magic deprived of her virginity before the conjugal intercourse, or a means of ensuring the consummation of the marriage by compelling the bridegroom to untie the knots; but in any case the untying of them is regarded as a necessary preliminary to coition. (p. 583)

In the Indo-Pakistani subcontinent, the groom sometimes has to give a special gift to the bride before he is allowed to untie her trouser-cord.

- [19] This carpet, which is dated 1912, is now part of the collection of the Museum of Ethnology in Munich (Inv.-No. 02-324 084; L 272 cm, W 173 cm).
- [20] See ill. No. 122: gouache in the Kangra style, c. 1840.
- [21] In another context in the Punjab, Zekiye Eglar reports the following ethnographic detail abouts knots as mnemonic aids: 'When a barber delivers wedding invitations, he carries with him a long string with as many knots as he has messages to deliver. With each message

- delivered, he unties a knot, and by the time he has completed his task all the knots are untied'. (1960, p. 87)
- [22] Not only as an item of basic need to prevent the trousers from slipping down, but occasionally also in case of car repairs to fasten the exhaust pipe or to use as a drive-belt (Asad Qizilbash, pers. comm.).
- [23] That means that, contrary to Banerjee's and Miller's statement (based on modern India) that 'the shalwar kamiz has become the garment that stands for functionalism and the power associated with pragmatism and efficiency' (2003, p. 246), there is a clear ambiguity inherent in the use of the trouser-cord as the essential accessory of wearing *shalwar-qamiz*. Thus, at least with respect to the Punjab and other parts of Pakistan, the dress is not as 'rational' as these authors make us believe.
- [24] Banerjee and Miller (2003, pp. 31, 34, 37, 85–6). On the *sari*'s inherent ambiguity the authors conclude:

The various ways in which the sari may be used to flirt and its deeper association with sexuality is entirely compatible with its portrayal and maintenance of modesty and its role as a form of veiling. Indeed, the ambiguity of the sari becomes an integral part of its effectiveness. Thus many of the woman's movements achieve their power and nuance as an act of covering up while still betraying a possible hint of desire, or an exposure that is eroticised precisely because it is so subtle and discreet, confirming the allure of modesty. (Banerjee & Miller 2003, pp. 88–9)

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