Research Article

Hollywood comes to Pakistan: Churails' appropriation of Hollywood detective genre

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
	This research study employs Bordwell, Thompson, and Staiger's classical Hollywood narrative framework to investigate how the Pakistani web series Churails appropriates and redefines the conventions of the traditional Hollywood detective genre by incorporating local cultural and social contexts. The study's findings provide significant insights into the emergence of new narratives in Pakistani media that draw inspiration from global genres while also reflecting local realities. The analysis contributes to the larger discourse on the global impact of the genre on contemporary media and has the potential to inform and influence media production and consumption practices, both in Pakistan and beyond.

INTRODUCTION

Stories and narratives are integral to our daily lives, shaping our perception, cognition, and emotion (Cutting, 2016). Scholars (see e.g., Habermas, 2018; Herman, 2011; Herman & Ryan, 2005; Herman et al., 2005) across various disciplines have long been intrigued by narrative structure and its impact on human experience. As we gain knowledge of the social world, we develop expectations about how events should unfold, simplifying our understanding of a complex world. In the context of movies, genre serves as the typical schema (Neale, 2000). The Hollywood detective genre, for instance, features suspense, intrigue, plot twists, individual heroism, and the triumph of good over evil (Buckland, 2017), with binary oppositions driving the narrative and technical features reinforcing tension and intrigue (Bordwell & Thompson, 2009). This genre has had a significant impact on filmmakers worldwide, particularly in the Global South (Plate, 2002; Rampal, 1996; Singh, 2023), inspiring new narratives that draw from Hollywood conventions while incorporating local cultural and social contexts. One such example is Churails, a Pakistani web series created by Asim Abbasi. This show has garnered significant recognition, as evidenced by its impressive score of 8/10 on the reputable global film and television database, IMDb. This unique narrative not only draws on the conventions of the Hollywood detective genre but also redefines and transcends them, creating a new paradigm for the representation of women in Pakistani society. Utilizing Bordwell, Thompson, and Staiger's framework of classical Hollywood narrative (Bordwell, 2010; Bordwell et al., 1985), this study aims to explore the ways the story is physically told and how it resonates with the general depiction of Pakistani women on media. Specifically, this study intends to investigate the following research question:

RQ. How does the Pakistani web series Churails redefine the conventions of the traditional Hollywood detective genre while also drawing on its conventions, and what are the implications of this for the representation of women in Pakistani media?

This study is significant from both a Pakistani media and Global South perspective as it provides valuable insights into the emergence of new narratives that draw inspiration from the Hollywood detective genre while also incorporating local cultural and social contexts. By exploring how a Pakistani web series like Churails redefines the norms of the traditional Hollywood detective genre while also drawing inspiration from it, this study contributes to the larger discourse surrounding the global impact of the genre on contemporary media and the emergence of new narratives that transform traditional genre conventions. Moreover, this study examines the implications of such genre-bending narratives for the representation of women in Pakistani media, emphasizing the need to understand how these narratives impact society's understanding of gender roles and cultural values in a rapidly evolving media landscape. The insights generated by this study have the potential to inform and influence media production and consumption practices, both in Pakistan and beyond.

CONTEXTUAL BACKGROUND: CHURAILS

The release of Churails' trailer in July 2020 caused a stir in Pakistan, as the series challenged traditional gender roles and presented empowered female protagonists forming a secret detective agency (Ramnath, 2020). By wearing burkas as disguises, the four women protagonists confronted issues of prostitution, misogyny, and abuse, exposing generational traumas (Kumar, 2020). The term "churail," a derogatory epithet, denigrates women deviating from traditional gender roles, perpetuating stereotypes (Chakraborty & Das, 2019; hooks, 2015; Mohanty, 2017). However, the show reclaims and celebrates the term, offering a unique perspective on Pakistani feminism. With a focus on site specificity and vernacular languages, Churails challenges prevailing stereotypes of Pakistani Muslim women (Salam-Salmaoui & Salam, forthcoming).

The ban on Churails in Pakistan was expected due to its unapologetically feminist themes and challenge to traditional gender roles (Mushtaq, 2020). The show faced intense criticism on mainstream and social media for promoting obscenity and immorality. Pakistani viewers accustomed to depictions of dependent women rejected the progressive approach (Fatima, 2019; Ul-Huda & Ali, 2015) as the show directly challenged deep-seated gender norms and values in Pakistani society. Featuring strong, independent female protagonists, Churails threatened to upend perpetuated gender roles by mainstream media (Salam-Salmaoui & Salam, forthcoming). The show's frank discussions on domestic violence, sexual abuse, and misogyny confronted entrenched patriarchal power structures (Jafar, 2005; Zia, 2019), leading to its outright ban by Pakistani authorities. This decision highlighted the ongoing tension between traditional and progressive values, underscoring the media's power to challenge or reinforce societal norms. In conclusion, the ban on Churails serves as a reminder of the ongoing struggle to challenge patriarchal values and break down gender stereotypes perpetuated by the mainstream media in Pakistan.

LITERATURE REVIEW: PAKISTANI MAINSTREAM MEDIA

A substantial body of scholarly work has investigated the influence of media on shaping individuals' beliefs and worldviews on a global scale. Various forms of mainstream media, including television, film, and newspapers, have been recognized as significant agents in disseminating specific gender ideologies (Alcolea-Banegas, 2009; Anwary, 2003; Carilli, 2021; Sheth et al. 2021). The existing body of literature on Pakistani media is both extensive and multifaceted, encompassing a myriad of methodological approaches and research foci. For instance, the representation of gender and power dynamics in media, which focuses on the depiction of women and men and highlights the reinforcement of traditional gender roles and stereotypes, has been investigated by Ali and Batool (2015), Ali et al. (2012), Cheema (2018), Khan and Ahmad (2018), Khan and Anwar (2016), and Yasmin et al. (2019). Additionally, Malik and Hameed-Ur-Rehman (2021) analyzed gender portrayal in Pakistani TV dramas over five decades, focusing on gender stereotypes in characters from popular Urdu serials aired between 1968 and 2017. The study found that while both genders displayed gender-specific stereotypes, some stereotypes were not displayed by males or females. Moreover, their study

found that changes in gender depiction were not linear, suggesting the role of other factors such as government policies in contributing to increasing or decreasing stereotyping over the years.

Another significant area of research is the portrayal of domestic violence in Pakistani Urdu drama serials, with Khan (2020) employing feminist textual analysis to uncover underlying power structures and societal attitudes toward gender-based violence. Moreover, Tabassum and Amin (2021) examined the effects of Pakistani TV dramas on the behavior and mindset of men and women. The study found that the dramas aired on PTV, ARY Digital, and HUM TV are likely to blur Islamic values and encourage men to divorce women while portraying a negative image of women. The study concluded that such content negatively affects people's mentality and fades true cultural values of Pakistan. Furthermore, a study conducted by Shah and Khurshid (2017) found that television media has a significant impact on social and religious value practices in Pakistani society. The way dramas, news, and advertisements are presented on television has brought conflicting effects to the social and religious value system and practices of the society, particularly on the youth. The findings suggest that television has a strong influence on shaping the societal curriculum, which includes the experiences that individuals have in the course of living. Studies have also explored the portrayal of diasporic identities in South Asian cinemas (Rampal, 2016), the rethinking of gender roles in Pakistani television dramas from the perspective of female viewers (Tahir & Rehma, 2021), and the recontextualization of ideologies in Pakistani TV dramas, focusing on tabooed representation (Zeb et al., 2021). This substantial body of research offers a comprehensive understanding of the various themes and dimensions in Pakistani mainstream media, highlighting the importance of media in shaping societal perceptions and expectations.

Despite the extensive body of research on Pakistani mainstream media productions, there is a noticeable gap in the literature concerning the genre-based analysis of Pakistani films and dramas, particularly with respect to exploring the narrative structure of these productions. By shedding light on the processes of cultural exchange, hybridization, appropriation, and adaptation in contemporary global media production, this analysis offers a fresh perspective on the relationship between media and genre in the Pakistani context. Ultimately, this nuanced analysis contributes to the ongoing debate on media representation and gender construction in Pakistani media, highlighting the importance of genre-based analysis in understanding the intricate dynamics of local productions.

CONCEPTUALIZING APPROPRIATION

In this study, we utilize James Lull's (1995) concept of *cultural appropriation*. This concept is a critical part of Lull's (1995) work, where he delves into cultural appropriation within the scope of global media consumption. His argument primarily centers on the interpretation, adaptation, and utilization of international media content, especially from hegemonic cultures, by audiences hailing from a wide array of cultural backgrounds. His framework serves as a common lens through which the consumption and subsequent modification of various cultural forms–including but not limited to music, fashion, and film–can be critically examined within diverse cultural environments.

In applying James Lull's (1995) appropriation framework to 'Churails' and its adaptation of the Hollywood detective genre, the series exemplifies a transformative cultural narrative. Lull (1995) proposes a three-phase process, each resonating with 'Churails' approach. The first, *deterritorialization*, involves the extraction of a genre from its original social context–in this case, transplanting the Hollywood detective genre from its Western roots. 'Churails' uses this genre as a blueprint for its narrative structure. The second, cultural melding and mediation, consists of *transculturation*, *hybridization*, and *indigenization*. Transculturation describes 'Churails' process of integrating narrative structures, themes, and tropes from the Hollywood detective genre into the Pakistani context. Hybridization refers to the blending of the imported genre with elements of traditional Pakistani storytelling, local vernacular, and cultural references, creating a unique cultural hybrid in 'Churails'. Lastly, indigenization reflects how 'Churails' adapts the Hollywood detective genre to accommodate local realities, forming a fusion of Western narrative style and Pakistani culture. The final phase, *reterritorialization*, concerns the integration of the modified genre into the new society. The Hollywood detective genre, now thoroughly Pakistani in character, becomes an integral part of the local narrative tradition in 'Churails'. The genre's foreign origin is recognized, but its presentation feels more indigenous than alien, testifying to the successful appropriation and adaptation process. In short, in the context of 'Churails,'

this appropriation begins when the director not only draws inspiration from foreign television genres and narratives, but also starts integrating the influences into his own storytelling. In broader terms, appropriation within 'Churails' could be conceptualized as local execution of a globally accessible narrative genre.

STUDY DESIGN

Analytical Framework

This research utilizes Bordwell, Thompson, and Staiger's framework of classical Hollywood narrative (Bordwell, 2010; Bordwell et al., 1985) to analyze the narrative structure of the Pakistani web series, Churails. The framework's salient features, including a clear cause-and-effect narrative structure, a linear temporal and spatial orientation, and a focus on character motivation, enable a comprehensive exploration of the underlying themes and tensions in the series. Its applicability to different film genres, including the Hollywood detective genre, offers insights into how narrative elements have been utilized to create engaging stories and how they have evolved over time due to cultural, technological, and historical factors. Specifically, this framework is used to examine the narrative structure, stylistic elements, and the impact of technological change in Churails, providing insights into the unique use of the film medium in this series and how it compares to the Hollywood detective genre. Furthermore, this framework is relevant for studying the detective genre in Pakistani filmmaking, which is not a staple genre in the industry dominated by love and war stories (Ahmad, 2016; Mehdi & Zaidi, 2019; Parveen et al., 2019). This approach provides a structured and systematic approach to analyzing media narratives, which can help identify patterns and trends within a genre or period of filmmaking and offer a useful tool for comparing and contrasting different films within the same genre or period, as well as across different cultural and historical contexts. By using this framework to analyze Churails as a detective genre, it offers a fresh perspective on how the genre has been adapted and transformed within the Pakistani context. This approach can potentially provide insights into the cultural and societal values and tensions that underlie not only the detective genre in Pakistan but also the evolution of Pakistani filmmaking as a whole.

Data Analysis

The aim of the analysis is to identify patterns and trends within the genre of traditional detective films, as well as the influence of cultural and historical factors on the development of narrative and stylistic elements in Churails. Moreover, comparing Churails to the Hollywood detective genre reveals the influence of international cinematic conventions and styles on local productions, providing insights into the processes of cultural exchange and adaptation in global media production. The analysis section of this research article focuses on three primary aspects of Churails: narrative structure, stylistic elements, and technological aspects, which are discussed in the subsequent sections.

1. Narrative structure
2. Stylistic elements

    2.1 Cultural props

    2.2 Visual props

3. Technological aspects

It is pertinent to mention here that our methodology was designed to provide a comprehensive yet focused examination of the content. While it would be methodically unfeasible to analyze every scene of every episode in detail, we aimed to ensure the scope of our analysis accurately reflected the thematic breadth and narrative nuances of the series. The selection of episodes for analysis was not random; instead, we employed a stratified approach, drawing from different segments of the series to capture the diverse narrative arcs and character developments. A combination of factors including plot significance, thematic relevance, and character interaction were factored into the decision-making process.

As for the selection of specific scenes within these episodes, we applied a set of criteria designed to isolate instances of significant narrative import. These criteria included factors such as narrative pivotality (scenes, which trigger or conclude major plot developments), character revelation (scenes, where new aspects of a character's personality, backstory, or relationships are revealed), and thematic density (scenes that are rich in

the show's underlying themes or motifs). This approach, while not exhaustive, provided a robust framework for our analysis, permitting us insight into the series' principal narratives and themes.

Further, to ensure the reliability of the data, we diligently examined the data until no new themes or insights emerged and we achieved data saturation. This approach strengthened the reliability of our analysis, as it demonstrated that we thoroughly explored the data and considered all relevant perspectives and patterns. By reaching a point of saturation, we ensured that our findings were comprehensive and reflective of the data collected, minimizing the risk of overlooking important information or potential biases. This rigorous process of data saturation contributed to the credibility and trustworthiness of our research findings.

Narrative structure

One of the notable aspects of the series is its *non-linear narrative structure*, which departs from the traditional cause-and-effect storytelling not only typical of mainstream Pakistani media but also from traditional Hollywood's detective genre. This departure from the norm offers a unique opportunity to analyze how the non-linear narrative structure of Churails interacts with the salient features of the traditional narrative framework, including a clear cause-and-effect structure, a linear temporal and spatial orientation, and a focus on character motivation. In this section, we examine the narrative structure of Churails and explore how it creates a distinctive storytelling experience.

Non-linear narrative structure is a storytelling technique that presents events out of chronological order, using flashbacks, flash-forwards, or multiple parallel storylines to create a non-linear timeline (Seemann, 2017) and this technique has been effectively utilized in Churails. One of the most prominent examples of non-linear storytelling in the series is the use of **flashbacks and dream sequences** to reveal key plot points and character backstories. For instance, in one of the episodes, we see Zubaida's (one of the four protagonists) flashback to her wedding day, where we learn about her abusive husband and the traumatic events that led to her becoming a churail. Throughout the series, the audience is given brief glimpses into Zubaida's past through flashbacks and allusions, but the details are never explicitly revealed. It is hinted that she suffered from abuse and trauma in her childhood, but the audience is left to fill in the gaps with their own imagination. This technique creates a more personal and emotional connection to Zubaida, as the audience is able to empathize with her experiences and understand why she behaves the way she does. Another example is in episode 3, where Batool has a flashback to a previous case, where she was betrayed by her male partner, leading to her distrust of men. The director utilizes the flashback technique to portray Batool's character in a nuanced manner, revealing the subtle allusions to her traumas through her behavior and interactions with other characters. These include her heavy drinking and difficulty in forming meaningful relationships, which serve to underscore the depth and complexity of her character. Her backstory is gradually revealed through a series of flashbacks that occur throughout the series. These flashbacks provide insight into Batool's motivations and backstory, allowing the audience to better understand her character and creating a deeper emotional connection. These subtle hints at her past add depth to her character and create a more nuanced portrayal of trauma and its effects. The use of flashbacks thus, in Churails serves a significant purpose in terms of character development and plot progression. By revealing past traumas and events in a non-linear fashion, the audience gains a deeper understanding of the characters' motivations and actions. Additionally, the use of flashbacks adds to the emotional impact of the story, as we witness the characters dealing with their past traumas and how it affects their present lives (Seemann, 2017; Zhe, 2022).

It is notable that Churails employs **flash-forwards** to create a sense of suspense and tension in the storytelling. Flash-forwards refer to the depiction of future events before they have occurred in the linear timeline of the story (Klecker, 2011). In episode 7 of Churails, a flash-forward is used to show the Churails being arrested and imprisoned, which creates a sense of intrigue and anticipation in the audience. The use of flash-forwards is a powerful tool for storytelling as it allows the audience to anticipate and imagine the outcomes of the story. In this instance, the flash-forward serves as a foreshadowing technique, indicating that the Churails' actions will have consequences, and creating a sense of anticipation for how the story will unfold. Additionally, the use of flash-forwards also disrupts the traditional cause-and-effect structure of the story, which is typical in linear narratives (Klecker, 2011). This deviation from traditional storytelling creates a unique and impactful experience for the audience. The use of flash-forwards is also significant as it allows the director to highlight the themes of consequences and accountability in the story (ibid). The flash-forward in Churails

foreshadows the repercussions of the characters' actions, emphasizing the importance of taking responsibility for one's actions. Overall, the use of flash-forwards in Churails is a compelling example of how non-linear storytelling techniques is employed by director to create suspense, tension, and thematic depth in narrative.

The non-linear narrative structure of Churails is also exemplified using **multiple parallel storylines**. Each character in the series has their own unique storyline that intersects with the main plot, providing depth and complexity to the narrative (Chinita, 2016). For example, Jugnu's storyline involves her struggles with her identity and her relationship with her family, specifically her father who disapproves of her chosen profession as a boxer. Her journey intersects with the main plot as she becomes involved with the Churails and helps them in their mission. Similarly, Sara's storyline in Churails focuses on her personal and professional struggles as a successful lawyer and mother, and how they intersect with her involvement in the Churails' mission. Through her character arc, the show explores issues of gender discrimination and inequality in the workplace, as well as the challenges faced by working mothers in Pakistani society. This storyline adds another layer of complexity to the narrative, as it highlights the intersection of gender, class, and power dynamics in the characters' lives. Furthermore, Batool's storyline is focused on her past traumas and her distrust of men, while Zubaida's storyline revolves around her abusive marriage and her decision to become a churail. By including these individual storylines, the series allows for a more nuanced exploration of the characters' motivations and experiences. The significance of these multiple storylines lies in their ability to provide a more complete picture of the characters and their actions, thus enhancing the overall impact of the story (Chinita, 2016). Using multiple storylines, Churails offers a complex and engaging narrative that explores the complexities of the human experience. More importantly, by weaving together these multiple storylines together, it elevates the show beyond a simple feminist revenge fantasy and creating a truly compelling narrative.

This non-linear approach to storytelling in Churails differs greatly from the traditional Hollywood detective genre, which typically follows a linear and formulaic narrative structure (Spina, 2017). In the Hollywood detective genre, the story is often focused on the detective's journey to solve a crime and bring the perpetrator to justice, with a clear cause-and-effect structure and a focus on plot over character development. In contrast, Churails prioritizes character development and explores a wide range of social issues through its multiple storylines. Additionally, the non-linear structure of Churails allows for a more nuanced exploration of the characters' motivations and experiences, creating a sense of depth and complexity. Despite this departure from the norm, Churails still exhibits several features of the traditional narrative framework, including a clear cause-and-effect structure, a linear temporal and spatial orientation, and a focus on character motivation (Bordwell, 2010; Bordwell et al., 1985). By combining non-linear structure with traditional narrative elements, Churails creates a unique storytelling experience that challenges the viewers' assumptions and expectations.

For instance, while Churails employs a non-linear narrative structure, it still adheres to a **clear cause-and-effect structure**. The central plot revolves around four women who come together to form a detective agency to expose the infidelities of powerful men in Pakistani society. The events that unfold are a direct result of their actions, and the story moves forward in a logical manner. Each event in the story has a clear cause that leads to its effect, and the characters' actions have consequences that affect the overall plot. For example, the main plot revolves around the Churails' mission to expose the corrupt men in their society. Each episode features a specific mission that is motivated by a cause, such as the need to protect a victim of domestic violence or to uncover the truth behind a suspicious death. These missions have clear effects on the characters and the plot, and the consequences of their actions drive the story forward. Similarly, in Hollywood detective films, the narrative structure is also driven by cause-and-effect relationship between events (Cutting, 2016; Klecker, 2011). For example, in the film Chinatown (1974), the private detective played by Jack Nicholson actively pursues leads and investigates a complex case involving corruption and murder. The events that unfold are a direct result of his actions, leading to a clear cause-and-effect relationship between events.

Similarly, in terms of **linear temporal and spatial orientation** (Bordwell, 2010; Bordwell et al., 1985), Churails still maintains a linear temporal and spatial orientation. The events in the story are presented in a linear timeline, with each episode building on the previous one. Additionally, the narrative structure of Churails is built around a series of investigations that take place over a period of several months, creating a sense of causality and temporal continuity. The story moves forward, with each investigation leading to new discoveries and revelations that drive the narrative forward. The use of multiple locations is also essential to the narrative structure of Churails. The story takes place in various settings, including the characters' homes,

the streets of Karachi, and various venues, where they investigate their cases. Each location is carefully chosen to create a sense of realism and authenticity and to contribute to the overall atmosphere of the series. Furthermore, the spatial orientation in Churails is also used to convey important information about the characters and their relationships. For example, the use of different settings such as the luxurious homes of the elite and the crowded streets of Karachi highlight the contrast between the haves and have-nots in Pakistani society. Overall, the temporal and spatial orientation in Churails is similar to the Hollywood detective genre, which also uses multiple locations and the passage of time to create a sense of realism and atmosphere (García-Mainar, 2013). However, the specific settings used in Churails are unique to the Pakistani context and contribute to a sense of cultural specificity and authenticity in the series.

Furthermore, the concept of **character motivation** is a crucial aspect of narrative structure in both Churails and the Hollywood detective genre. As outlined in Bordwell, Thompson, and Staiger's (Bordwell, 2010; Bordwell et al., 1985) framework for classical Hollywood narrative, character motivation drives the story forward and provides a clear reason for the actions and decisions of the characters. In Churails, the main characters have distinct motivations for joining the detective agency, and their actions are consistent with these motivations throughout the series. For example, the character of Jugnu is motivated by a desire for revenge against her abusive husband, and her actions throughout the series are consistent with this motivation. She is willing to go to great lengths to get back at him, including breaking into his house and stealing evidence. Similarly, the character of Sara is motivated by a desire to expose corruption in Pakistani society, and she is driven to investigate and expose the infidelities of powerful men to bring about justice. This is similar to the Hollywood detective genre, where the protagonist is often driven by a strong sense of justice or a desire to solve a particular case (García-Mainar, 2013; Spina, 2017). For example, in the film Chinatown (1974), the character of Jake Gittes is motivated by a desire to solve the case of a missing woman, which leads him to uncover a larger conspiracy involving corruption and greed. Like the characters in Churails, Gittes is consistent in his actions and decisions throughout the film, and his motivations provide a clear reason for his actions. Overall, the concept of character motivation is an essential aspect of narrative structure in both Churails and the Hollywood detective genre. It drives the story forward and provides a clear reason for the actions and decisions of the characters. This allows the audience to become invested in the story and the characters, and to understand the reasons behind their actions (Cutting, 2016; García-Mainar, 2013; Klecker, 2011; Spina, 2017).

Moreover, Churails also follows the Hollywood detective genre in terms of **character development**, as the four women at the center of the story undergo significant personal growth throughout the series. The development of the female characters is a key aspect of the narrative, and their individual stories and motivations are explored in-depth throughout the series. This is similar to the Hollywood detective genre, where the protagonists often undergo significant character development and personal growth throughout the course of the story (Franks, 2014; Melikhov et al., 2020). In contrast, one key difference between Churails and the Hollywood detective genre is the role of the protagonist. While traditional Hollywood detective films often feature a lone male detective as the central character (Gates, 2006), Churails features four female protagonists who work together to achieve their goals. This highlights the importance of female solidarity and collective action in Pakistani society and challenges traditional gender roles and power structures. Overall, while Churails shares several narrative elements with the Hollywood detective genre, such as causality and character development, it also introduces unique elements, such as the role of female protagonists and the portrayal of Pakistani society and culture. In short, using non-linear narrative techniques such as flashbacks, dream sequences, and multiple parallel storytelling, the show is able to delve into complex themes in a nuanced and engaging way. It enables a comprehensive exploration of the characters' pasts and motivations, while also creating a sense of emotional intimacy and empathy with the audience.

Stylistic elements

In terms of stylistic elements, Churails makes use of both **visual and cultural props**. Visual props can be defined as physical objects that are used to enhance the visual narrative of a film or TV series. These props can be anything from simple handheld objects to elaborate set pieces and special effects (Bloch, 2013; Bucciferro, 2021; Thompson et al., 2003). On the other hand, cultural props can be defined as objects, clothing, or other items that are specific to a particular culture or society. These cultural props can add depth and

authenticity to a film or TV series and can help to create a more immersive viewing experience for the audience (Corrigan & White, 2003). Together, the use of both visual and cultural props in Churails serves to enrich the show's storytelling and create a more intricate and compelling narrative.

Visual props: The use of visual props is a significant aspect of both the traditional Hollywood detective genre and Churails. In Churails, the show employs several visual props that are commonly associated with the detective genre, including long lens cameras, guns and ammunition, binoculars, flashlights, hidden microphones, disguises (wigs, glasses, etc.), handcuffs and zip ties, knives, pepper spray, mobile phones and tracking devices, laptops and computers, and surveillance cameras and equipment (Primasita & Heddy, 2019; Sprengler, 2022; Thompson et al., 2003). The use of these props serves to create a sense of authenticity and familiarity for viewers, as they are often used in crime and detective stories. Additionally, the use of such props also adds a sense of tension and suspense to the narrative, as they are often used to heighten the stakes and danger faced by the characters (Primasita & Heddy, 2019; Sprengler, 2022). For instance, the ***use of guns and ammunition*** as a visual prop in Churails is similar to its usage in the Hollywood detective genre. Guns are often associated with power, authority, and violence (Aultman et al., 2020) and are used as a symbol of these concepts in both genres. In Churails, guns are used by the characters to assert their power and authority, often as a means of self-defense or protection. For instance, the character Jugnu uses a gun to protect herself from her abusive husband, and Zubaida uses one to intimidate her husband's mistress. However, it is worth noting that the use of guns in Churails is not glorified or fetishized, as is often the case in Hollywood detective films. Rather, it is portrayed as a necessary tool for survival and self-defense in a society, where women are often vulnerable to violence and abuse. The use of guns in Churails is therefore significant in highlighting the challenges faced by women in patriarchal societies, and the need for them to take matters into their own hands in order to protect themselves and assert their rights.

Similarly, the ***use of long-lens camera*** in Churails serves as a visual prop that emphasizes the importance of surveillance and secrecy in the show. The camera is used by the Churails to spy on cheating men, highlighting their role as vigilantes who seek to expose the double standards of Pakistani society. This also underscores the theme of empowerment, as the women are taking control of their own narratives and using technology to their advantage. Furthermore, the use of the long-lens camera is significant in the context of Pakistani culture and society, where women's movements and freedoms are often heavily restricted. By using the camera to subvert societal expectations and expectations of women's behavior, the Churails are reclaiming their power and challenging patriarchal norms. Likewise, Churails also utilizes ***gadgets and technology*** to aid in their detective work. One example is the use of spy cameras, which are hidden in objects such as pens, watches, and glasses. The use of these gadgets is significant in that it highlights the resourcefulness and creativity of the Churails, who are able to adapt to their surroundings and use the tools at their disposal to achieve their goals. It also serves to challenge traditional gender roles, as the use of gadgets and technology is often associated with male characters in detective genre films. Another gadget that is prominently featured in Churails is the ***mobile phone***. The characters frequently use their phones to communicate with each other, as well as to access information and evidence related to their cases. The use of mobile phones is significant in that it reflects the importance of technology and social media in contemporary Pakistani society, while also serves as a commentary on the power dynamics within the society. For example, the character Zubaida, who comes from a lower socio-economic background, is shown to be less technologically savvy than the other characters, highlighting the digital divide that exists within Pakistani society. Overall, the use of gadgets and technology in Churails serves to enhance the show's realism and relevance to contemporary Pakistani society, while also highlighting the resourcefulness and ingenuity of the Churails.

However, what is significant to note here is that the use of visual props such as guns, long lens cameras, and technology in Churails is significant in subverting the typical gender associations of these props, which are often seen as being exclusively masculine (Gates, 2006). In a conservative Pakistani society, where traditional gender roles are strictly enforced, the use of these props by the female protagonists is a powerful statement of their empowerment and agency. By using these props in the context of their detective work, the churails challenge the dominant patriarchal narrative that women are weak and powerless, and instead portray themselves as capable and resourceful. Additionally, the use of technology in their detective work highlights the importance of modernization and innovation in challenging the traditional cultural values that

often serve to restrict women's freedom and autonomy. Overall, the use of visual props in Churails serves to subvert traditional gender roles and expectations and contributes to the show's larger message of female empowerment and liberation.

Cultural props: In terms of cultural props, Churails incorporates several visual elements that are specific to the Pakistani context and add a unique flavor to the series. These cultural props are utilized to further enhance the show's authenticity and connection with its Pakistani audience, as they incorporate specific cultural symbols and visual cues that are recognizable and meaningful to the local population (Ara, 2019; Maturo, 2008). Additionally, the use of cultural props allows the show to explore and comment on important cultural issues, such as the impact of patriarchy and conservatism on women's lives in Pakistan. The use of such props also serves to subvert dominant cultural narratives and challenge the status quo, creating a space for critical reflection and dialogue on issues of gender, power, and representation (Berg, 2002; Projansky, 2001; Thornham, 1999).

One notable example of the cultural prop used in Churails is **burqas or hijabs (veil)**. The incorporation of cultural props, specifically the burqas/hijabs, in Churails underscores the significance of considering cultural specificity in media representation (Hall, 1989; Han, 2023). By incorporating these as props, the show challenges the pervasive Western-centric gaze in global media production and instead emphasizes the importance of local cultural elements in storytelling. The use of cultural props in Churails can be seen as a form of cultural reclamation, as it highlights the unique aspects of Pakistani culture and society and provides a space for local voices to be heard. This is particularly important in the context of media globalization, where dominant cultural narratives often overshadow diverse and local perspectives (Kraidy, 2002). Therefore, the use of cultural props in Churails not only adds depth and richness to the narrative but also contributes to a larger conversation on the importance of cultural specificity and representation in global media. More importantly, the use of *hijabs and burqas* as cultural props in Churails holds significant implications in the Pakistani context. In a society, where the wearing of hijabs or burqas is often a hotly debated and contested issue (Noor, 2007), their portrayal in the series serves to highlight the diversity of Muslim women's experiences and challenges the monolithic portrayal of Muslim women in the media (Al-Fartousi & Mogadime, 2012; Navarro, 2010). By showcasing Muslim women who choose to wear hijabs or burqas as powerful, independent, and capable, the series challenges the dominant narrative that sees these women as passive and oppressed. Furthermore, the use of hijabs or burqas as cultural props also serves to highlight the intersectionality of identity and the ways in which different cultural and religious factors intersect to shape women's experiences. Overall, the use of hijabs and burqas as cultural props in Churails contributes to the larger theme of female empowerment and challenges traditional notions of Muslim women in the media.

Similarly, another cultural prop used in the show is the use of **Urdu language and other local dialects**. The use of Urdu in Churails represents a significant shift in the dominant narrative of global media production. By foregrounding the Pakistani cultural context and incorporating local dialects and colloquialisms, the series challenges the hegemony of English as the primary language in global media (Guo & Beckett, 2007) and emphasizes the importance of linguistic representation in media production. Moreover, the use of Urdu and local dialects in Churails enhances the authenticity and realism of the series, making it more accessible and relatable to Pakistani audiences. This authenticity and realism contribute to the larger themes of cultural specificity and representation in media production. Additionally, the use of Urdu adds a unique flavor to the series, setting it apart from other global media productions and highlighting the ways in which local cultural elements can be incorporated into global media to create unique and engaging narratives (Sifaki, 2003). Overall, use of Urdu in Churails represents an important example of how linguistic and cultural representation can challenge dominant narratives and contribute to a more diverse and inclusive media landscape.

It is also significant to note the **portrayal of Karachi** as a cultural prop in Churails. This portrayal is significant because it challenges dominant Western stereotypes of Pakistan as a monolithic and homogenous society (Ahmed & Matthes, 2017; Salam-Salamoui, 2022), and instead highlights the country's diversity and complexity. The portrayal of Karachi in Churails also demonstrates the ways in which Pakistani media is reclaiming narratives of its own cities and societies and creating its own unique representations. Furthermore, the depiction of Karachi in Churails also reflects the influence of historical and cultural factors on media production. By depicting Karachi as a diverse and culturally rich city, Churails is able to convey the complexity and diversity of Pakistani society, while also highlighting the role of historical and cultural factors in shaping

contemporary media representations. In conclusion, the portrayal of Karachi in Churails is a significant cultural prop that contributes to the authenticity and uniqueness of the series. By showcasing the diversity and complexity of Pakistani society, Churails challenges dominant Western stereotypes and highlights the ways in which Pakistani media is creating its own unique representations. Additionally, the portrayal of Karachi reflects the influence of historical and cultural factors on media production, emphasizing the importance of considering these factors in understanding the complex relationships between media, culture, and society (Hesmondhalgh, 2006).

The use of the other cultural elements such as **music**, **food**, and **architecture** serve to create a more nuanced and diverse portrayal of Pakistani society that is often overlooked in Western media. The incorporation of Pakistani classical and contemporary music, as well as traditional and modern architecture, in Churails serves a twofold purpose: to highlight the richness and diversity of Pakistani culture and to add authenticity and an engaging experience for the audience. By utilizing these cultural props, the series reinforces the idea that non-Western cultures should be celebrated and valued for their unique characteristics, challenging the dominant narrative that Western culture is superior to non-Western cultures (Jin, 2021). This inclusive approach to cultural exchange serves as a powerful message and encourages a more respectful and accepting attitude towards diversity. Overall, the use of cultural props in Churails contributes to the larger themes of cultural specificity and representation in media production and underscores the importance of diverse and authentic storytelling.

Technological aspects

Bordwell, Thompson, and Staiger's (Bordwell, 2010; Bordwell et al., 1985) framework of classical Hollywood narrative is centered around the analysis of film narratives through the exploration of conventions and expectations particular to the Hollywood film industry. Though the framework does not explicitly address the new technological aspects, it acknowledges the impact of technological advancements on film style and industrial practice.

In terms of the technical aspects, in Churails, the director has utilized **modern visual effects and cinematography techniques**[1], such as drone shots and slow-motion sequences, to create an aesthetically stunning narrative that pushes the boundaries of traditional Pakistani cinema. One aspect of new technology in Hollywood cinema that is relevant to Churails is the use of digital effects and post-production techniques (Schulz et al., 2021). Churails uses these techniques to create a stylized and visually striking look, particularly in scenes that involve violence or intense emotions. For example, in episode 3, when Batool is attacked by her husband, the use of slow-motion, saturated colors, and exaggerated sound effects create a visceral and emotionally charged experience for the viewer. Another technological aspect is the use of digital cameras and advanced lighting techniques to create a cinematic look that mimics the visual style of traditional film. Churails uses these techniques to create a high-quality look and feel that is comparable to Hollywood productions. For example, in episode 1, the use of soft, natural lighting and shallow depth of field in the scene, where Sara and Jugnu meet for the first time creates an intimate and visually appealing atmosphere. Historically, Pakistani cinema has been limited by low budgets and technical resources, which have restricted the use of advanced visual effects and cinematography techniques (Ahmad, 2016; Parveen et al., 2019). The incorporation of these modern techniques in Churails represents a significant departure from the traditional aesthetic of Pakistani cinema and drama industry, contributing to the series' distinctiveness and visually dynamic storytelling. The use of these techniques not only enhances series' overall production value but also emphasizes the potential of Pakistani cinema to compete with global film industries in terms of technical standards and artistic merit.

The release of Churails through **an OTT platform** (over the top internet streaming), as opposed to traditional media platforms like television or cinema, has significant implications for the Pakistani film and television industry. The shift towards online streaming platforms not only provides greater accessibility to audiences both within Pakistan and internationally but also democratizes the production and distribution of media content, allowing independent filmmakers to compete with larger, established global studios (Nirmal & Kaitharath, 2022). The emergence of these platforms has transformed the industry, fostering a more diverse

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[1] For detailed discussion see e.g., Reclaiming femininity: A multimodal critical discourse analysis of Pakistani web series Churails' title track "Doosra Janum" (Salam-Salmaoui & Salam, forthcoming)

and inclusive media landscape that has given rise to more nuanced and sophisticated portrayals of for instance, gender and identity in Pakistani media. The boom in OTT platforms (Baranidharan, 2023), as seen through the success of Churails, has allowed for a wider range of women characters to be portrayed in more nuanced and empowering ways, challenging patriarchal norms that have long silenced their voices in mainstream media. By providing a less regulated space for content creation and distribution (Chaurasia, 2022), these platforms have created an environment in which women can share their experiences and perspectives, diversifying the Pakistani media landscape. Churails is a testament to the potential of OTT platforms to challenge and subvert dominant gender norms in the South Asian media industry, providing a counter-narrative to the traditional gender roles depicted in mainstream Pakistani media. Online streaming platforms have allowed for a more diverse and inclusive representation of gender identities in Pakistan, providing a more accurate reflection of the country's complex social reality. As such, these platforms have served as an emergent and empowering space for counter-discourse and narratives that challenge, subvert, and deconstruct exclusionary, reductive, and essentialist nationalist, religious, and cultural politics surrounding non-conformist gender identities in Pakistan. Therefore, the emergence of OTT platforms has had a transformative effect on the Pakistani film and television industry, particularly for marginalized communities such as women, and Churails is a prime example of the potential of these platforms to challenge dominant gender norms and foster a more diverse and inclusive media landscape in Pakistan.

DISCUSSION

The analysis of Churails in this study offers insights into the potential for Pakistani media to draw on global genre conventions while simultaneously appropriating and redefining them to reflect local cultural and societal realities. By adopting a non-linear narrative structure and incorporating diverse local cultural and visual props, Churails appropriates the traditional norms of the Hollywood detective genre, presenting a fresh perspective on its potential for transformation. This approach challenges the monolithic portrayal of Pakistani society found in mainstream media, such as Netflix's "homeland," where Pakistan is often depicted in a narrow and negative light as a military-dominated, terrorist-infested hellhole. Moreover, Churails subverts traditional gender roles by challenging the association of guns, surveillance cameras, and long lens cameras with masculinity, presenting a feminist perspective on the genre. Through its progressive portrayal of strong, independent female protagonists, the series defies long-standing gender stereotypes and contributes to a more inclusive and diverse representation of women in Pakistani media. In terms of technological aspects, while Hollywood has been at the forefront of utilizing advanced technology for decades, Churails marks a significant step forward for the Pakistani film industry. The incorporation of new technologies and OTT platforms demonstrates a growing interest and capability in embracing contemporary media production trends. This analysis sheds light on the representation of women in Pakistani media, showcasing the potential of media to challenge traditional gender roles and reflect local cultural and societal realities. By exploring genre-based analysis in the context of Pakistani films and dramas, this study enriches the existing scholarship on media representation and gender construction in the Pakistani context.

The concept of cultural appropriation, as defined by James Lull (1995), provides a valuable framework for understanding the processes of adaptation and modification that occur when genres are transplanted from one cultural context to another. Through Lull's (1995) lens, we see how Churails engages in a transformative cultural narrative. The series undergoes a process of deterritorialization by extracting the Hollywood detective genre from its original Western context. This genre then undergoes a complex process of cultural melding and mediation within the Pakistani setting, involving transculturation, hybridization, and indigenization. The outcome is a unique cultural hybrid that blends elements of the imported genre with traditional Pakistani storytelling and local cultural references. Churails successfully reterritorializes the adapted genre, integrating it into the local narrative tradition. The series becomes a testament to the successful appropriation and adaptation process, where the Hollywood detective genre finds a new home within the Pakistani cultural landscape. This appropriation is not mere imitation but a skillful incorporation and reinterpretation of global narrative styles into a locally relevant context.

Overall, the analysis of Churails exemplifies the potential for Pakistani media to draw on global genre conventions while appropriating and transforming them to reflect local cultural and societal realities. Through

its innovative narrative structure, stylistic elements, and technological incorporation, Churails challenges conventional representations and offers a progressive and inclusive portrayal of women in Pakistani media. This exploration of cultural appropriation within the series contributes to the ongoing discourse on the transformative potential of global South media, where narratives can be reimagined and recontextualized to challenge dominant cultural and gender norms. The insights generated by this study have the potential to inform and influence media production and consumption practices, both in Pakistan and beyond, fostering a more nuanced and diverse representation of women in Pakistani media.

CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, our analysis of Churails demonstrates how Pakistani media can redefine and appropriate global genre conventions while reflecting local cultural realities. The series successfully challenges traditional gender roles and offers a feminist perspective on the Hollywood detective genre. By portraying strong, independent female protagonists, Churails defies long-standing stereotypes and contributes to a more diverse representation of women in Pakistani media.

For future researchers, this study highlights the need for further exploration of genre appropriation in Pakistani media and its impact on audience perception. Additionally, incorporating a broader range of media productions and including audience perspectives would provide a more comprehensive understanding of genre transformation in the context of Pakistani media. However, it's important to acknowledge the limitations of this study, which focused solely on Churails and lacked audience perspectives. Despite these limitations, the analysis underscores the potential of global South media, like Churails, to challenge dominant cultural and gender norms through genre-bending narratives.

In summary, Churails exemplifies how Pakistani media can creatively adapt and reinterpret global genre conventions, leading to transformative and inclusive narratives. This study contributes valuable insights to the ongoing discourse on media representation and gender construction in Pakistani media, and it has implications for fostering more nuanced and empowering portrayals of women in both local and global media landscapes.

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