QUEER COMPANIONS

RELIGION, PUBLIC INTIMACY, AND SAINTLY AFFECTS IN PAKISTAN

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In the company of lovers
– past, present, future –

CONTENTS

Transliteration of terms from oral sources remains a challenge. My interlocutors spoke Urdu, Sindhi, Punjabi, Seraiki, and Balochi. While the terms and concepts in use often bear Arabic, Persian, or Sanskrit roots, my transliterations reflect a diverse sociolinguistic ethos and privilege the colloquial and the spoken over their etymological origin or written form. I adopt fakir instead of *faqir* to better capture the term's vernacular inflection and alternate etymology in Sehwan and not to privilege or reproduce its colonial referencing. I also remain aware that an easy recourse to translated terms, or my rendering of distinct Islamic concepts such as *dargah* (threshold) as *shrine* and *wali* (friend of Allah) as *saint*, is far from ideal given their Christian connotations. For the sake of readability, I have also minimized the use of diacritics. Similarly, plurals of most non-English terms are indicated by adding *s* (for instance, *kafi*s for lodges instead of *kafiyun*). I employ italics for non-English words and English words that were used in otherwise Urdu sentences as well as to indicate emphasis. All translations are my own.

Stories of arrival are very often also stories of companionships. This book is somehow also propelled by a once-peripheral argument between friends. Sehwan, 2012: On a sweltering July evening in the field, Delphine Ortis and I couldn't agree less on the term *intimacy* to describe saintly religious experience. It was on that occasion, as my field notes attest, that I first brought up and defended *intimacy* in its devotional and extrasexual terms. Karachi, the following year: Shayan Rajani's otherwise simple provocation to think of my material in relation to the Pakistani state would ultimately prompt me to venture beyond the personal and to explore intimacy's public infrastructures. Zurich, 2015: Bettina Dennerlein invited me to think more politically about the concerns and contours that queer theory was introducing into my project, more broadly what queer brought to the study of religion. Her gentle nudge animates the coda to this book. Finally, Lancaster, Pennsylvania, 2018: while at the Capacious Conference, an online chat with Blake Beaver on a dating app amusingly led me to Elizabeth Ault, the book's eventual editor. Arguments, provocations, flirtations, invitations—possibly also ones I am unable to recall or reproduce here—capture the various paths, prompts, and persuasions by which this book has arrived. That this work of many years has come to fruition is also not without the systematic support and long-term care I have received from my mentors and fellow scholars, friends and lovers, whose persons

and contributions I wholeheartedly acknowledge here. The book is in their and others' debt, for solitary as the experience of writing so often feels, it is that craft by which we place ourselves in companies: citational, intellectual, affective.

My greatest debt is to the fakirs of Sehwan: all endeavors toward this book would have been entirely futile without their generosity. They are the ones who opened their hearts and minds to facilitate my project even when some were not too certain of my methods, let alone my means of learning or modes of knowing. They have trusted my motivations all the same and have, with their insights, recommendations, and deeply personal stories and conflicts, led me as well as this work in new and exciting directions.

This book has found its shores in the company of many a guide, though foremost among them is Hansjörg Dilger. This book simply would not exist without him. He has most closely guided this journey and in the process also shaped me as a scholar. I am most fortunate to have had his magnanimous support and incredible care over the years. First as my *Doktorvater* (doctor father)—the academic equivalent of the Sufi figure of the guide—and then as a project leader in collaborative research, his attentive thinking and intellectual generosity have enabled me to grow in my own skin, and for that I remain in his debt. The greater part of this research was carried out in the framework of a doctoral project at the Berlin Graduate School Muslim Cultures and Societies at Freie Universität, Berlin. It was made possible by a financial grant received from the German Research Foundation (DFG). Earlier fieldwork in 2009 and 2010 was carried out with the support of Aga Khan University (International) in the UK and Mission Interdisciplinaire Française du Sindh (MIFS), respectively. I am equally grateful to all members of the dissertation commission, especially to the project's cosupervisors, Magnus Marsden and Hermann Kreutzmann.

A huge thank you to Michel Boivin. He has remained a friend, a mentor, and an inspiration for my involvement in Sehwan. I have lovingly called him my *murshid*, the master who shows the path, for in his generosity and openheartedness as a scholar, he has proven to be a guide who never stops giving. So much of my understanding of Sehwan is indebted to him; so much of this work can only proceed in light of his scholarship. To the brilliant Elizabeth Ault, my editor at Duke University Press, my heartfelt gratitude: her insightful engagement has enabled this work to prosper in decisive ways and to find its own pathways. In her editorial care, I have won myself a cothinker, and for her remarkable support and company

The long road to a book invariably involves writing, revisions, and rewriting. Sections of chapter 1 appeared in "Pilgrimages of the Dream:

On Wings of State in Sehwan Sharif, Pakistan," in *Muslim Pilgrimage in the Modern World*, edited by Babak Rahimi and Peyman Eshagi, 133–48 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2019); some ethnographic details of chapters 2 and 3 can be traced to "Women (Un-)Like Women: The Question of Spiritual Authority among Female Fakirs of Sehwan Sharif," in *Devotional Islam in Contemporary South Asia: Shrines, Journeys and Wanderers*, edited by Michel Boivin and Rémy Delage, 47–62 (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2015); and an early incarnation of chapter 5 found itself in "Grounds of Becoming: Fakirs among the Dead in Sehwan Sharif, Pakistan," *Culture and Religion* 18, no. 2 (2017): 72–89. When compared to these earlier writings, the book departs significantly in conceptual terms. It has no doubt benefited from the editorial reviews of previous publications as well as the feedback this work has received over the years at various conferences and workshops.

The field research that I have been able to carry out in Sehwan over many years is due only to the kindness and hospitality of its people: fakirs and their spiritual masters, visiting pilgrims or those employed at the shrine, policemen, Auqaf officials, contract workers, tea boys, photographers. I am particularly grateful to Sayyid Mehdi Raza Shah Sabzwari, one of the traditional custodians of the shrine at Sehwan. His hospitality and support have been exceptional. I am also indebted to Sayyid Hasan Shah Khatdhani, a prominent spiritual figure of Sehwan, for the countless evenings during which I was able to partake of his unconditional guidance, wisdom, and generosity. Worthy of mention are also the Lakkiyari sayyids, who have welcomed my research endeavors in Sehwan. I would especially like to thank Nazir Ahmed Sehwani for being ever so forthcoming with his knowledge of local sources, histories, and traditions. His support was instrumental to my early work in Sehwan. I will forever be grateful to my dearest Marvi Mazhar for helping me first get access to women in the shrine courtyard back in 2009. I have also benefited from my exchanges in the field with researchers of the MIFS. The opportunity to share fields—physical and discursive—with a scholar like Michel Boivin has greatly advanced my historical understanding of the context; with Rémy Delage I have learned to appreciate procession routes and the complex organization of fakir lodges in the town; my ongoing conversations with Delphine Ortis, a dear friend and fellow anthropologist, have taught me much about Sehwan's ritual life, and for it I have come to better read my own material. She also makes return appearances in several chapters of this book. My research stay in Sehwan was graciously supported by the

Department of Antiquities, Government of Sindh, Pakistan. I would like to thank Dr. Kaleemullah Lashari, Mr. Wasim A. Ursani, and Mr. Saeed A. Awan, who have served as department secretaries during this period and with whose approval my stay at the department's rest house in Sehwan was facilitated. I am grateful to Hamir Soomro, without whose help and interventions I would not have been able to overcome some of the bureaucratic hurdles that came with accessing state institutions and archives.

Like all research, this work has also nurtured me beyond the field, through very personal labors of life in Berlin. Jérémie Mortier, Olivier Capillon, Bani Abidi, Schokofeh Kamiz, Rachel Knaebel, Sylvia Schedelbauer, Zahra Lakdawala, and Ali Raza: to these friends, my lovelies and other lovers, who bring meaning to a life in migration, a big thank you for your enduring friendships, for listening to my endless fakir stories, for bearing with my unsolicited disquisitions on intimacy. I am grateful to my colleagues at the Collaborative Research Center, Affective Societies, in whose company I have discovered my love for everything affect-y. I also appreciate the support I have received from colleagues at the Institute of Social and Cultural Anthropology at Freie Universität, Berlin. A sincere note of thanks to people at Leuchtstoff and Myxa, two cafés in Berlin-Neukölln, for accommodating my daily spells of writing. Just as this book has arrived by many paths, it has also taken me to several places. Parts of this book were also written during writing retreats in Istanbul, Austin, Thessaloniki, and Bolzano.

"To theorize, one leaves home," notes the anthropologist James Clifford (1989, 177). Yet departures and displacements, wanderings and wayfaring that ethnographic research brings about are in some measure also in service of knowing oneself, for such forays unsettle far more than they produce, theory or otherwise. When I first arrived in Sehwan in July 2009 at the tail end of a two-year MA program in Muslim Cultures, it was three years after I had quit a five-year career in architecture. A great deal was up in the air. It was only in time and in the company of fakirs that I would come to better understand that giving up a secure course in life and taking on new ones involves pursuing an evading cluster of promises; that such wayfaring against lines means that certain destinations will fall behind us; or that arriving takes a brush with uncertainty, ambivalence, and a fear of the unknown. Thus, I remain grateful also in cognizance of those who have not only witnessed this journey but have been affected by it in personal and profound ways. I wish to wholeheartedly thank my parents, whose general skepticism about what I do or why I do what I do has com-

pelled me to reflect on what makes this work so personal; my dearest sister, Munazza Kasmani, whose faith, despite my wanderings, has not once wavered; and not least Amna Iqbal, or Amo, with whom I once learned to cherish dreams but also, to whose disadvantage, possibly, I have questioned orientations and dispensed with inherited lines. What makes this work deeply personal is hence also that which could not be salvaged in the wake of turmoil. It warrants the acceptance that Sehwan has altered me, in ways hard to describe, let alone put to page, or that I have come into my queer self not only in metropolises—Karachi-raised, academic by way of London, Berliner-by-love—but perhaps more definingly through the un-straight persuasions of an ancient and multifaith place of pilgrimage. In some ways, this book is that intimate journey. It is still, first and foremost, a fulfillment: one promise delivered in a pursuit still unfolding.

On Coming
Close

قُرب | *qurb*
(Urdu, from Arabic) Intimacy, closeness,
affective nearness, trust

An unfolding, a bloom, an elaboration: intimacy is an inward genre with outward skins. So long as to intimate is to imply more than to tell, make known through an indirect sign, coming close is to be in the queer course of disclosure. Affect, likewise, is a felt mode of indistinct knowing. *Queer Companions* asks, what unfolds or takes hold as individuals draw close to deceased Islamic saints in the present? It ruminates on the futures that intimacies with saints afford as well as the existing sociohistorical relations their enshrined figures frustrate, make awry, or simply expand. It trails patterns, rhythms, refrains—felt and enfleshed, be they tender, tormenting, or taut—that flourish between distinct but close bodies and by virtue of their affective bonding. Crucial to such thinking by way of the intimate is the book's predominant insight that intimacy blooms, if only haltingly
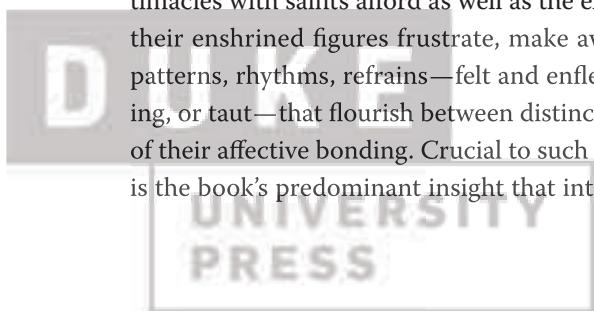
and piecemeal, through critical affective relations, knowings, and obsti-
nacies. These are *unstraight affordances* in terms of this book, or those
inclined prospects of futuring that are revealed or foreclosed by virtue of
one's coming close to saintly objects, often at the expense of other social
objects, at times simply alongside them.

Queer Companions is an ethnography. Set in the ancient pilgrimage
town of Sehwan in Pakistan's Sindh Province, it narrates the life-altering
paths of fakirs (also *faqir*s).[1] They are the ascetically drawn protagonists
of this book who, on the basis of their growing bonds with a thirteenth-
century saint, abandon home, question inherited lines, and forego straight
economies of family and work. Whether in dream meetings or in the
midst of busy shrine economies, via attachment to tombs or through re-
clusiveness, coming close in this book has world-making ramifications: in-
timacy textures as much one's sense of being historical as saintly affections
mobilize futures in excess of ascribed lines of the social. Intimate bonds
with saints, as I understand and explore through various fakir life stories,
enfold and unfurl consequences that suture scales of the personal and the
political in Pakistan. These are, in the book's view, affective formations
that imbricate individuals, society, and the state in a public architecture
of intimacy.

Part of what I am pursuing here—refracting affect through saintly ar-
chives and Sufi-religious matrices—is the epistemological work of regath-
ering intimacy in ways that do not squarely home in its Euro-American
genealogies and secular orientations.[2] Islamic saints, strangers if not
anomalies to queer and affect studies, are intimate lovers and queer com-
panions in this book, knotty fellows if you will, whose more-than-human
ties and tangles with the living—fakir or otherwise—serve to affectively
reappraise the world. It follows that *queer* in this project isn't strictly a fig-
ure of sexuality. It serves rather as that capacious hermeneutic by which
we come to read not so much religion queerly—what a project of queering
Islam might demand of us—as we advance by reading queer religiously.[3]
The distinct endeavor here is to appreciate how and why the unfrequented
intersections of religion and queer, no matter how notoriously difficult or
haltingly adaptive, are in fact openings.[4] *Queer Companions* avails the
chance to define the terms and shapes of this critical meeting ground.

A dining room conversation in Karachi had gone awry. Using the English words *line* and *cross* in an otherwise Urdu sentence, my mother thought it timely to reprimand me. A heated argument ensued about a mere photograph taken in jest at Sehwan's shrine. It was in fact a photo template in which Amin, a photographer for hire at the shrine, had artificially inserted my image alongside the saint of Sehwan through computer-aided techniques—intimate company my mother found not one bit amusing. Saints, even if ubiquitous, are divisive figures in Pakistan, though none is more vexing than the saint in question: La'l Shahbaz Qalandar (d. 1274 CE, henceforth Lal) is a thirteenth-century mystic known for his radical rejection of Islamic religious institutions, norms, and practices.[5] Paradoxically, the antinomian saint is Pakistan's most beloved figure of devotion, whose tomb-shrine in Sehwan, a town of about a hundred thousand residents, draws millions each year.[6] As a modern-day avatar of an ancient site of pilgrimage, the town by the Indus River remains a magnet for ordinary pilgrims and radical ascetics alike. Devotees come from a whole spectrum of social, religious, and ethnic backgrounds. If Sehwan attracts the poorest of the poor, Lal's followers have also included the country's former prime ministers and its top fashion models and photographers. Sufi by renown, Shivaite in heritage, and increasingly Shi'i in following, Sehwan is in many ways Pakistan at its complex best.

Back in the family dining room, the photograph featuring the saint and myself had ruffled quite some feathers. Pictures like these were otherwise popular mementos. Pilgrims in Sehwan were routinely caught in prayer-like postures at the shrine, posing with the saint as it were, facing, however, not his tomb as was customary, but the camera. Photographers carried albums illustrating a variety of available templates. For a reasonable expense of 50 rupees, one was able to place oneself in a graphic assemblage featuring not just saintly figures, sites, and symbols but also political personalities. The one featuring Benazir Bhutto and Lal was an all-time favorite. Also popular was the template with Bodlo, the saint's most favorite disciple. On the left side of this composition is a particularly affectionate scene: Bodlo has his head resting in the saint's lap while the saint's body is seen leaning forward, his palm securing the disciple's head in a loving embrace, so close that his body is almost indistinguishable from the body of the saint. Bodlo's intimacy with Lal is no accident. Believed to be his

contemporary, Bodlo is the fakir par excellence whose shrine is the second
most important site for pilgrims in Sehwan today.[7] The melding figures
confirm Bodlo's affective closeness to the saint but also a saintly status of
his own. On the right side of this template is the space where the pilgrim's
figure is usually inserted. The elaborate blue-tiled facade of the mauso-
leum serves as backdrop, while Lal is additionally featured flying above in
his popular falcon form (see fig. 1.1). What had tipped things over with my
mother that night was a different iteration of this image in which Bodlo's
face had been virtually replaced with mine. In this version, I was no lon-
ger just an onlooker standing next to an affectionate scene between saint
and fakir. I was the one in loving embrace with the saint, my head securely
placed in his lap, my body queerly close to his, arguably too close for com-
fort (see fig. 1.2). The ensuing argument with my mother was proof that
such intimacy with the saint, even if doctored through photo software and
relegated to an image, wasn't to be taken lightly.

To be fair, the risqué move of intervening in the iconography of the
saint was not lost on me either. I clearly remember my hesitation in the
moment the photograph was being worked over. Graphic collaging, cut-
out figures with changeable clothes and replaceable heads, were common
features in creating poster art of the saints, items usually sold in markets
adjoining shrines in Pakistan (Frembgen 2012b, 130). Still, I was not sure
how a request to replace Bodlo's face with mine would fare with Amin.
We were sitting in a tiny shop right across one of the shrine's secondary
entrances when I spontaneously brought up the idea of tweaking the for-
mat. He had paused for a moment, asked me to confirm what I had said,
then smilingly proceeded with the task on his computer. To our utter sur-
prise, the photograph became an instant hit at the shrine as Amin proudly
showed it to others. The embrace, which some at the shrine read as the
saint's approval of my research, didn't really raise any eyebrows. Instead,
photographers and pilgrims couldn't stop commenting on the likeness
of my face to that of the saint's favorite disciple. What caused marveling
at the shrine generated disturbed reactions at home. When I shared the
photograph with my mother, I counted on her good humor, just as when
she had responded to other templates, the one with Benazir Bhutto, for

instance. I expected her to see what people at the shrine saw: if not the saint's favor, the uncanny resemblance to his disciple perhaps. Come to think of it, my mother did see as others saw. To her, much like the shrine-goers, the saint's affection in the photograph was no laughing matter: neither dormant in any way nor a meaningless object that one might overlook. If not the power of saints, the power of intimacy was unmistakably compelling. As my mother put it that evening, *a line has been crossed*.

Then, three years into my research and hardly 300 kilometers north of Karachi, Sehwan still felt like a world farthest from where I had grown up, a distance impossible to cover in a four-hour drive to the town. That shrines were frowned upon at home was hardly news to me. Invoking saints or seeking their assistance had no place in the reformist version of Islam I had grown up with.[8] A visit to a shrine, however ubiquitous in the Pakistani landscape, never featured in our daily lives; venerating saints was, in fact, shunned at home, equivalent to the great sin of attributing partners to the one God. I was also aware that my growing involvement with Sehwan as a site of intellectual inquiry and my constant discussion of its affective-emotional lifeworlds evoked all shades of anxiety at home. Did I believe in miracles of the saint? Was I taking part in rituals? Why was there a red thread on my wrist? Had the saint appeared in my dreams? Did I consume food offerings at the shrine? These were questions regularly asked of me. Why saints make for knotty figures of the social, are anxiety-evoking and proverbially contentious, also has to do with the notion that saints as per Islamic imagination are not simply the sanctified dead, comfortably buried and done away with. Saints are literally friends of Allah—*wali* (pl. *auliya'*) in Urdu from Arabic—who, precisely on grounds of intimacy and by virtue of their closeness to God, are privy to divine knowledge and potentially active companions to the living.[9] They are, as is commonly believed, the more-than-living. Invariably, then, the hot question of correct Islamic practice, a perpetually debated and argued issue of public relevance in Pakistan, involves the contentious place and agency of saintly, noncorporeal and otherworldly beings in the world.[10] Naveeda Khan (2012) and Katherine P. Ewing (2006) have both in their own ways shown how such lines of discord have a way of cutting through Pakistani publics—workplaces, neighborhoods, families, and households—enabling at times a critical and creative space for reordering social relations through engaging in religious disputation.[11] In our home, such space for arguing *in* Islam was often found when sharing meals. Just as it is both perfectly ordinary and characteristically Islamic for Muslims to make meaning in difference from

one another—a point Shahab Ahmed makes in his framework for conceptualizing Islam—the everyday object of the dining table offered a perfect setting: it laid out, if you will, for every member of the family, an individually scaled but historically given possibility and position from which to hermeneutically enter "a vast and polyphonic discursive terrain" (2016, 193). It also bears mentioning that just as Sehwan isn't simply a Shi'i place, neither entirely Sufi, whether shrine-going or otherwise, being Sunni in Pakistan is not a settled matter either. It involves navigating a range of theological opinions and doctrinal orientations from four schools of jurisprudence to Ahl-e Hadis of my family who follow neither.[12] In their religious but equally class-inflected worldview, figures like Lal were historical beings properly dead, incapable of affecting the world in the present and whose tombs drew only the uneducated, the unenlightened. Hence, it wasn't really the views on saints and shrines that struck me, but rather a profound paradox that shone through such microanxieties. Saints' allure, which my family so vehemently rejected, still harbored a futural property, as it were—enduring affects borne, if not from their remote acting beyond the grave as is commonly believed of Islamic saints, then of my more deliberate and immediate ways of coming close to them. My affinity for Sehwan, which my father had once compared to the risk of drowning, was an unfolding peril insofar as such ties introduced other historical objects or did not extend existing shapes of inheritance. Saints were risqué companions, shrines a risky business, and a simple photograph, in this instance, a harrowing record of a wayward affair.

Had I come too close? Did I go too far? I then wondered. A line or not, in moving from the right of the composition to the left in the photograph, I had indeed crossed some distance. So long as to move toward or to be close to certain objects involved a gradual becoming remote to certain others, the saint's embrace or embracing the saint were political moves with ethical stakes whose implications far exceeded a singular scene of intimacy. What such intimacy dis/closes, that is to say, what it unfoldingly affords or impedes, makes up the greater material of this book. It was in fact a woman at Sehwan's shrine who had first pointed me to the stirring effects of tarrying with saintly relations, that is to say, such intimacy's durational affects, its *long middle* so to speak, that space of feeling out before intimacy is durable enough to count as an event (Berlant and Edelman 2014, 22). Figures like her are primary interlocutors in this work: women, men, and gender-variant fakirs who leave home in pursuit of saintly objects to eventually and invariably arrive in Sehwan. They come

from all over the country: from urban metropolises to small villages, from medium-sized towns to sparse settlements. Their life-altering paths in this ethnography are life stories of coming close. Whether converging at the shrine or moving through remote realms of dream, crossing material stretches or imaginal thresholds, coming close to Lal invariably involved going far along social, spatial, and temporal lines. It is in saintly trysts and fakir bonds that this book locates and sutures notions of intimacy and futurity, the latter being intimacy's capacity for forward endurance in time.[13] I argue that coming close to saints, whether or not yielding, embroils public economies and ecologies of affect. I also contend that saintly intimacy bears futural-political import insofar as it affords individuals expanded possibilities of the social and, if only durationally, authors more-than-inherited ways of being in and with the world. Long before I was to articulate this line of thinking with companions in queer and affect theory, a woman fakir had already evoked its terms: Zaheda had serendipitously, as it were, divined a prognosis of my research. Her line, much like my own, is a pathway into the book.

Our lines had first crossed on the white marble floor of the shrine courtyard in July 2009. By late afternoon that day, the heat was giving way and, suitably enough, the general mood at the shrine had turned leisurely. Clusters of women were hanging out under the open sky. As I singled out Zaheda for a chat, I had assumed her to be like other women at the shrine, that is to say, vow-making women in pursuit of healing or improvement in their everyday circumstances. Part of that expectation derived from literature on South Asian shrines and sites of ritual healing.[14] A great deal of that was true for Sehwan too. Female pilgrim narratives and women's motivations to be at saints' places were largely marked by familial disputes and personal tragedies: many of these were accounts of illnesses, afflictions, family hardships, possessions, and evil spells. Zaheda's purpose, as I would come to learn that afternoon, was unlike that of most women. She was a fakir or, better still, "in the line of fakiri," as she herself put it. *Fakir*— also the word for *beggar* in Urdu, at times an honorific for transgenders in Sindhi—here refers to persons who take up voluntary poverty as an ascetic performance of devotion. To be poor, as Delphine Ortis (2020, 317) has noted, is to embody the ideal that fakirs possess nothing, not even their own selves. Fakirs in this book are distinctive individuals who arrive in Sehwan as a result of prophetic dreams and personal callings, some in search of mystical mentors; others leave home in the face of family feuds,

accidents, court cases, illnesses, disappointment in love, or simply out of severe economic or social deprivation. Many live on donations from pilgrims and devotees, but some also rely on their practice as spiritual guides and healers to run households and support families. Acquiring spiritual roles also means that fakirs earn a measure of respect, which not only comes to remedy the disadvantage that such persons might bear in terms of economic class and social status, but as in the case of women, also advances their otherwise rare prospects for a public life. In short, Zaheda's public place in the shrine was precisely a result of her fakir status.

At the time of our first meeting, Zaheda was in her early forties. She had been married for about twenty-five years, with eight children, and belonged to a middle-income household. Intrigued as I was by Zaheda's singular purpose and circumstances, I remember being equally amused by her choice of the English word *line* in an Urdu conversation. Line wasn't a limit, a thing to cross or transgress, as my mother had meant in reacting to the photograph. It was a figure of orientation in Zaheda's use, a thing that distinguished her from other women. More compellingly, in this statement of hers, to be a fakir was not so much to be someone as it was to be going somewhere, a path to something, a line, which in Zaheda's description she had been precariously attending to for over seven years. Metaphors of orientation and journeying made sense also because these were citations of what Muslims call *tariqat*, the path of the mystics.[15] More remarkable, however, was the fact that for months at a stretch, a thousand or so kilometers away from home, Zaheda spent her days and nights alone in the shaded arcades that flanked the length of the shrine's forecourt. She was regularly surrounded by women, largely visitors who would consult her on spiritual matters. Though despite their everyday presence at saints' places, lone and unchaperoned women were not a common sight in Sehwan.[16] Zaheda, too, knew well that her stay at the shrine of Sehwan at the expense of Sargodha, a city in the Punjab where her family lived, demanded explaining.

"I am very close to him," Zaheda had remarked in one of our early exchanges. What sounded like a somewhat ordinary statement carried a pronounced sense of achievement. She had backed it up with a quick *masha'allah* (what Allah has willed) as if to protect herself from her own sense of pride or the evil eye of others. Her use of the word *qarib* (close) signaled her distinction from other women and her chosen status in relation to Lal, the saint of Sehwan whom she had simply referred to in the third person (him). *Qurb*, from which the word *qarib* derives, is a con-

cept that stands for affective nearness and conditions of intimacy. Thus, to be close in this instance is not simply to be *nazdik*, the other Urdu word for proximity, which would speak to her physical location in the shrine courtyard in relation to the tomb of the saint. *Qarib* additionally portrays Zaheda as a bearer of *qurb*, the one who has found closeness to the saint in emotional-affective terms. It is such intimacy that distinguishes fakir figures from ordinary pilgrims and enables them to perform as intermediaries with the saint and as spiritual guides to their followers. In fact, as Delphine Ortis (2020) has argued, through being in the service of saints and by virtue of their engagement with devotional artifacts, fakirs, though exclusively men in her case, are able to build themselves up into potential saints in Sehwan.

In evoking the figure of the line, not only had Zaheda evoked the question of being oriented, but being in line also meant awaiting an outcome. Being close or near in this sense was also to be nearly there. Seven years into her pursuit, Zaheda at the time of our first meeting described herself as on the verge of accomplishing her fakir goals; she anticipated that things were about to settle. In other words, to be close was to be imbued with a sense of futurity. It pointed to the impending or to that which was about to happen and thus was already a presence without yet being actually present in the present tense (Muñoz 2009, 9). What followed, however, through the course of my research was contrary to Zaheda's expectations. Her protracted stays at the shrine regularly invited her husband's displeasure, keeping her occupied with domestic trouble. In the years to come, she would question her marriage as well as her fakir pursuit. She would fear the loss of lines and the saint's affection toward her, become riddled with doubts and dilemmas, conditions I take up in chapter 3 of this book. Although even before her ordeals began, Zaheda was acutely aware that being in the line also meant a parting with other lines, other objects, other places. Far beyond her own story and circumstances, Zaheda's *qurb* with the saint, the conditions of its possibility, the possibilities it births and the existing relations it seizes, become a way to think through intimacy in this book.

More critical is the idea that private feeling or intimate relations with saints carry ramifications for broader regimes and critiques of power. However personal Zaheda's circumstances in the courtyard seemed to me at first and irrespective of how relations unfolded, she was, by virtue of her ties with the saint, implicated in the shrine's greater political economy. Part of this can be explained by the fact that shrines like Sehwan are pub-

lic endowments (or *waqf* properties) in Pakistan, governed through bureaucratic means of the state. Authorized by a federal ordinance in 1959, saints and their places have since come under the purview of the Department of Auqaf, a subsidiary of the Ministry of Religious Affairs.[17] A move as radical as the shrine's takeover from its traditional custodians in 1960 has since served to disrupt consolidations of power among the local elite in Sehwan. These include sayyids, that is, families that claim descent from the Prophet Muhammad, and who held control over shrine revenues at least since the colonial period, as well as local Hindu patrons long associated with shrine services and ceremonies.[18] Public administration has thus also involved a straightening of the shrine's Shivaite heritage on the part of the state (see chapters 1 and 2). Given long-standing, patrilineal structures of spiritual transmission in Sehwan, fakir lines like Zaheda's are neither the norm nor exactly free of what the Pakistani state disposes or arbitrates. In fact, as part of the shrine's fractured authorities, the state's governing presence unsettles much more than just local economies and configurations of power.

February 16, 2017, at home in Berlin: I was on the phone with a journalist friend from Karachi who worked for the *Friday Times*, an English-language weekly. Just hours before, and barely meters away from where Zaheda and I had first crossed paths, a suicide bomber had struck the courtyard of Sehwan's shrine. More than eighty people were killed. It fit the tragic pattern of recent years whereby key Sufi shrines in Pakistan have periodically been targeted by hardline militants and radical Islamist networks. As I penned a commissioned response to the tragedy, it was plain to me that plural conceptions of the social and compound ideas of the divine that figures like Lal and Sehwan bear forth will always be unsettling in a Muslim-national present that rests on a severance from its polytheistic Hindu past.[19] This aside, it is also widely understood that shrines invite all manner of claim making and contest, or that Islamic saints make for immensely resourceful partners, if not also rivals. As parallel networks of social welfare, Sufi shrines provide free food, healing, and shelter to the poor in Pakistan. These are sites where devotees make vows and enter into beneficial transactions with saints and where saints return favors and generate revenue and work opportunities; where pilgrims cross religious lines, share substances and rituals, meet fakirs, and find living spiritual masters.[20] It is here that women deal with spirits; their radical desires can be publicly owned at shrines, their sorrows proverbially eaten away (Taneja 2017, 224, 266).[21]

More profound still is the underlying idea that Islamic saints as *wali*s are entitled to *wilayat*, a concept that empowers their figures with territorial influence and spatial authority. In such understanding, saints are often in a relation of contest with rival forms and political sources of sovereignty. Cognates of the term *wali* encompass meanings that range from friendship to governance and guardianship and explain why, historically speaking, such figures' authority was "considered as having a direct influence on the political events and material destiny of the realm over which it was exercised" (Digby 1990, 71).[22] It is no coincidence that saints' shrines, as seats of *wilayat*, are commonly regarded as durbars in South Asia, that is, royal courts or courts of law (Bellamy 2011).[23] Saints, intimate lovers as they are in this book, are also known to act as judges who arbitrate conflicts and pronounce verdicts. Their meddling roles and reputations are part of the reason why "shrines break the order of straight lines" (Mittermaier 2008, 48) or explain, for that matter, how shrines can run parallel to projects of the nation-state, why saints are a worry to the political, or, in the interest of this book, what informs the Pakistani state's motivations to govern *with* saints (see chapters 1 and 2). These are also cues for what exasperates saints' and the state's respective and joint counterpublics in Pakistan. One could argue that at stake in recent violent confrontations is a contest of mediation, not interpretation of religion, as everyday disagreements within my family would have us surmise. Emilio Spadola has noted that in order to successfully destroy saintly authority, militants or antishrine actors are faced with the challenge of effectively destroying "shrines' literal *appeal*—the call of the shrine" (2019, 224, emphasis in original). In a historical and transcultural account of shrine destruction, Ali Azfar Moin (2015) has argued that confrontational acts of violence and desecration of religious sites are better read as enactments of sovereignty: to the extent that the attack at Sehwan by antistate actors and networks is an assertion of rival sovereignty through an act of shrine desecration, it also perversely confirms the enshrined saint as mediator and sovereign, the one who acts and calls, if not in place of, then in tandem with, powers of the Pakistani state. In Lal's durbar at Sehwan, pilgrims continue to return the saint's call in great numbers (see fig. 1.3). Devotees petition as much as they await decisions, seek refuge at his shrine, or simply partake of his presence.

Folding a horrific episode of violence with a woman's labor of intimacy in the saint's courtyard—same place, different times—is not to give voice to the easy discourse of Sufis-under-threat or, for that matter, to pitch good Islam versus bad. Rather, it here serves to establish the idea that fakir relations

with Lal are in fact inscribed in a greater set of radical affordances, good or
otherwise, coincident or not, that Sehwan and its saint bring to bear in Pa-
kistani society. As much as the Pakistani state regulates shrine lifeworlds,
administers their manifold revenues, I argue that it also serves to advance
people's material and affective access to saints. Zaheda's vexing departure
from the domestic and her access to a public life at the shrine involve pos-
sibilities that dis/close by virtue of her coming close to the saint. Such af-
fordances, I contend, are cofigured through multiple scales and relations,
and fold out as part of a greater historical process. Thus, attendant to my
deliberations on saintly intimacies is the idea that intimacy is a public genre:
in coming close to saintly objects, as inwardly moving as such process is,
individuals do not withdraw, rather draw near to public economies and his-
torical ecologies of affect. After all, saintly relations, even at their yielding

best, routinely feature moments of disorientation or occasions when such orientations fail, become knotty or obstinate, or particularly when saints no longer afford what they might once have promised.

Zaheda's story of being in the line—and also those of others in this book—serves as a perfect illustration of orientations that involve and introduce affective pathways to more-than-given histories and futures. The rendering of affective ties with saints in terms of orientations, to draw from Sara Ahmed (2006, 21), can be a way to understand how turning affections toward saintly objects is a turning away such that it threatens to take us off a certain line, displace given objects, exasperate existing social relations, and support the pursuit of less-ordinary lifelines. My view that turning toward saintly objects, or in Ahmed's (2006, 56) terms, facing some ways more than others, affords queer prospects hangs on the understanding that what is straight, properly linear, or unmarked is not a matter of a single norm but refers to a more pervasive notion of guidelines. Tim Ingold uses the example of rules and margins in school exercise books to show how such lines "present no physical barrier to movement, but nevertheless entail consequences—more or less dire—should they be crossed" (2016, 160). Fakir pursuits are famously arduous and likewise never without consequence, also for the simple fact that they betray inherited lines or extend outside commonplace logics of reproduction.

Ascribing lines to fakirs, as Zaheda did, isn't entirely novel, especially if one is to attend to the common Urdu expression *lakir ka fakir*, literally, "fakir of the line." In everyday terms, the expression conveys a lack of originality, blind faith in one's way of life, a sense of predictability in predetermined patterns of action in that to be a *lakir ka fakir* is to tread the beaten path. In short, to be unquestioning of oneself is to be like a fakir; to be uninventive in affairs of life is also fakir-like. But fakir lines, as the many life stories in this book attest, involved a fundamental questioning of their paths, an altering condition of being affectively drawn, a carrying on with relations never entirely knowable or routinely secure. What is seldom appreciated of the proverb in question is how the fakir also stands for intimacy with an object, attachment to a different course of action toward that object, such that to follow a line like a fakir is to stay the course. It is to be committed to its linearity whatever its form, to tarry with what a line in bloom offers or seizes—in other words, to remain dedicated to where a path may take us. Fakir lives in this book reveal what it means to abide by, draw closer to, expect, or await a thing, just as such committing to a line of futurity, being aligned, so to speak, can lead to a being out of line.

Coming close to saints expands one's field of social and ethical relations in the present. Growing affections also texture what being historical or futural means. The public blooms of intimacy I read in and across individual life stories are long "temporal accounts of affectivity" in Jan Slaby's (2020, 173) terms: inclinations, prospects, postures that proceed as much from the present as these are drawn from what has been going on. Slaby's rumination hangs on Christina Sharpe's (2016) notion of "the wake," which is specifically concerned with unfolding and unresolved conditions of Black non/being within the contemporary.[24] The context notwithstanding, he articulates a foundational relationship between affect and what has been. It informs the book's view that intimacy is a space of bloom. Or that, though happening in the now, intimacy is also that prevailing affective texture through which the past filters into the future or "remains operative within the sensual fabric that enables and stages, prefigures and disfigures the present" (2020, 174).

The book's notion of unstraight affordances makes it possible to discuss dis/closures of intimacy, that is, how saintly bonds in bloom reveal or foreclose historically operative prospects in the present. The ecological psychologist James Gibson (1979, 127) coined the term *affordance* to name "the complementarity of the animal and the environment" or what a historical environment, for good or ill, offers, provides, or furnishes. Unlike mine, Gibson's primary concern is visual perception. Detailing how an observer might relate to substances, surfaces, objects, and animals, he notes that "affordance cuts across the dichotomy of subjective-objective and helps us to understand its inadequacy. It is equally a fact of the environment and a fact of behavior. It is both physical and psychical, yet neither" (129). Affordance, a concept more widely adopted in design, materiality studies, and human-computer interactions, refers to "the perceived or actual properties" of an object "that determine just how the thing could possibly be used" (Norman 1988, 9).[25] For instance, one might ordinarily remark that a chair intuitively affords a sitting on, a standing on too, possibly even throwing, whereas balls afford throwing and bouncing, and only when large enough can be sat on. Similarly, knobs are for turning, and a particular design interface on a digital screen might allow users to swipe left and right. Unstraight affordances then, no matter explicitly given, implied, or hidden, are queer inclinations specified by a relationship, whether dis/closed within a given interaction or tied to a historical ecology. This

said, to be afforded a thing, for good or worse, does not reduce the fakirs of this book to passive or reactive agents in relation to the saint. In fact, affordance is better understood as a reciprocal notion: "behavior affords behavior," in Gibson's (1979, 135) terms.[26] It would follow that saints are not doing the affording on their own, *suo moto*; rather, these are historical figurations of intimacy either prompted or in need of requiting, leaving fakirs, also scholars, to parse a coauthored reality that takes shape through a complex interplay of mutual affordances. Viewed another way, such companionship is about how individuals turn perceptive with saints—"a gangly accrual of slow or sudden accretions" by which saintly historical agencies reach a level of expressivity in fakir ways of being (Stewart 2010, 339)—and equally, how saints in turn find their bearings in the world as the more-than-living. Affordance in this book, as that which intimacy dis/closes, unstraight or otherwise, hangs on how each companion perceives and attends to the qualities of the other. It is therefore critical that intimate partners appreciate the limited opportunities for action, or simply recognize where in a given interaction such opportunities may lie (Taylor 2012, 8). It also means that a failure to recognize an affordance or not heeding it does not take away from the opportunity intimacy presents or its capacity to unstraighten ordinary futures. As a notion that operates in the company of queer, unstraight in this book adds conceptual capacity for theorizing social prospects that evolve against due or expected course.[27] It is also that figure of historical inclination by which our relation to the past is altered just as we can appreciate how a for-granted continuity between inheritance and reproduction is disrupted or made askew in the present. This said, what is at work here is not so much a neat, singular, or paramount history, but rather the multiple, unresolved, even sparse notions of the past and the present that are mobilized through felt and enfleshed modes of saintly bonds. Thus, unstraight affordances give name to a whole set of ideas and inclinations, feelings and knowings, figures and futures that (saintly) intimacies draw and dis/close, or simply those prospects of the social that would otherwise have remained remote or discreet, out of public path or capture, or that ordinarily hang aslant to straight, secular, or dominant histories.

Part of what this book must confront is how what ostensibly betrays the straight—"straight" being also the righteous path in Islamic terms (Najmabadi 2014, 172)—can be yielding all the same in social-spiritual terms.[28] Approaching fakir pursuits in the vocabulary of unstraight is not entirely amiss when the saint of Sehwan, after whom fakir lives are mod-

eled and toward whose shrine fakir journeys are oriented, is associated with a thirteenth-century band of antinomian mystics, more precisely, *qalandar*s whose spiritual merit was in fact premised on their deviance and departure from established religious lines and social norms. Katherine P. Ewing has observed how the prototypical *qalandar* in its contemporary iterations in urban Pakistan "confronts the proper Muslim" and "challenges the naturalness of the prevailing social order from within" (2006, 202, 217).[29] It ought to be said that fakir quests in the postcolonial present are shaped by conditions distinct from those of their predecessors. *Qalandar*s were part of an anarchistic ethos specific to cultures of the Persian world, and who resisted the institutionalization and elite formations of Sufi brotherhoods of the time.[30] Liberated from social custom and often regarded as *be-shar* (without shariah/law), a defining characteristic of *qalandar*s, as Ahmet Karamustafa (2006) notes, was their "persistent cultural and social iconoclasticism and unconventionalism." Such figures were notorious for transgressive bodily acts, extreme isolation, perpetual wandering, and an ostentatious rejection of social-religious institutions and authorities. Reading historical sources on the symbolism of hair among Persian *qalandar*s, Lloyd Ridgeon (2010) makes the case that antinomian practice or betraying proper or standard Islamic religious code, even if designed to shock public sensibility, is not an argument for such figures' lack of attachment to Quranic and religious referents insofar as their deviant performances served to uphold an ethical relation to the divine. In fact, the *qalandar* topos, in its literary iterations, stood for the idea that deliberate and open disregard for social convention was an undertaking "in the cause of 'true' religious love" (Karamustafa 2006, 33). Similarly, Shahab Ahmed (2016) offers the fascinating case of *madhhab-i 'ishq*, a love-centered "mode of being with God where love is [equally] a way of going about being Muslim" (38). Prevalent among its aficionados—across the vast geography of what he has identified as the Balkans-to-Bengal complex in a period enduring from the fourteenth to the late nineteenth centuries—was the cultural practice of wearing one's hat crooked, *kajkulahi*. He suggests that to wear the hat thus was "an act of social bravado" and "a statement, made deliberately by the individual hat-wearer, and read consciously as such by society, that the person was not concerned to be seen to be conforming to the prescribed appearance of moral uprightness and public propriety." Yet for the wearer, he suggests, its crookedness connoted an inclination toward the divine and therefore a distinct mode of making meaning, which was located not in legalistic but

precisely in aesthetic—and might I add affective—models (Ahmed 2016, 202–3). What Shahab Ahmed is arguing here is that such crooked orientation toward divine love—"loving being risky business" as he reminds the reader—does not ferry the individual beyond or outside Islam; "rather, by constituting crooked-hattedness in terms of Islam," the wearer constitutes "Islam in terms of crooked-hattedness" (204).

The reading I am, however, inclined to pursue is that fakir ways of being in the present are enfleshed and affective endurances of social deviance, religious protest, and disguised mystical excellence. These tropes have varyingly prevailed in Sufi con/texts, practices, and bodies at least since the eleventh century.[31] In other words, these are *sustained affective textures* that carry over and extend historically given possibilities of living an otherwise life. Thus, intimacy with saintly figures and the public histories they bear afford fakir individuals a situatedness to act from, a posture, so to speak, not so much outside or beyond but beside Islamic norms.[32] *Beside* makes for an interesting proposition to think along unstraight, which, in Eve Sedgwick's terms, "permits a spacious agnosticism about several of the linear logics that enforce dualistic thinking" (2003, 8) or whose "defining relationality is internal as much as it is directed toward the norms it may challenge" (9). Fakir orientation toward a thirteenth-century *qalandar* is not exactly a straightforward relation to begin with, especially when such mystics' itinerant lives and extreme isolation make them perfectly evading figures in the historical record. This is true for the saint of Sehwan too, whose hard-to-locate, mixed, and fractured heritage, as I parse in chapters 1 and 2, makes him a figure of mystery and multiplicity. Fakir lines to Lal are made up of tilting, diverging, or broken-up orientations that refract through dense legends or sparse historical record and resist orderly figurations of the saint. Consider simply the detail that Lal bears at least three genealogies—Sufi, Shi'i, and Shivaite—or that his followers cannot quite agree on his doctrinal persuasion, Sufi affiliations, not even his actual name, Sayyid Usman Marwandi. The saint is better known by the three-part epithet Lal Shahbaz Qalandar.[33] Lal's Shi'i descent through the Isma'ili line is well established; however, he is also claimed through Suhrawardi and Qadiri Sufi registers.[34] His site of burial, the present-day shrine at Sehwan, is thought to replace an ancient Shiva sanctuary.[35] Sources remain incredibly scarce, but in addition to Shi'i-Isma'ili influence in the region, Boivin (2012b, 40) notes that Shivaism and Daryapanth were two principal forms of Hinduism rooted in Sehwan at the time of Lal's arrival. Archaeological findings as well as continuing

Hindu pilgrimage in and around the region confirm a greater pattern of Sufi sites, which at times have coincided with places of Shivaite veneration in the region.[36] Jhule Lal, the modern chant directed at the saint, was once a call to the river deity of the Indus worshipped by the Hindu Daryapanthis.[37] The name Sehwan is itself a remnant of the older Shivvahan (the village of Shiva).[38] And the shrine, whether formerly a temple or not, evidences a rich history of Hindu association and patronage.[39] Lal's unresolved history explains why his shrine, along with its relics, revenues, services, and ceremonies, has remained riddled by different claims. It has historically attracted long-drawn-out disputes of authority involving fakirs, princely patrons, sayyid elite, traditional custodians, and, more recently, the Pakistani state.[40]

Whether plurally sacred or religiously risqué, Sehwan demands as much as it exhausts comprehensibility. Religious complexity, however, doesn't always warrant that we explain one tradition through the other.[41] In fact, to read Sehwan as ambiguously Islamic, as Carla Bellamy would have it, underestimates, in my view, believers' capacity to find clearings amid sacred density.[42] The ambition of this book either way lies not in how or in what terms Sehwan is an Islamic place, rather what its plural orientations, abundant histories, fractured heritage, and compound sense of the divine do to prevailing relations, economies, and processes of affect in the context of a postcolonial, Muslim national present. By the same token, it is not squarely in transgressing but in asserting otherwise, being beside Islamic precepts, distilling meaning through religion's oblique historical models, aesthetic and affective, wherein I inscribe its queer-political value.

Critical to the conceptual ecologies of this book is the notion of public intimacy. The book's deliberations follow in light of Lauren Berlant's statement, "Intimacy builds worlds." If indeed intimacy not only creates anew but also "usurps places meant for other kinds of relation" (Berlant 1998, 281), I point to the political stakes and futural bearings of saintly intimacy, which is to consider all that intimacy frustrates as it thrives, the ordinary relations it threatens to replace but also the plural possibilities of relating it births in the process of its bloom—for individuals, society, and the state in Pakistan. I explore not only what intimacy is or means in the context of individual fakir lives but also how intimacy endures or what it does in and to a particular field of power relations as it unravels, unfolds over time. The book's stance that fakirs develop intimate bonds with saints or that saints have a way of exhausting other social relations is, however, not an

argument for one dyadic relationship replacing another; rather, it points to a radical copresence of polyvalent relations. In fact, saintly intimacy, even when it involves a single or dominant figure of bonding, is always already embroiled in a historical field of diverse, mediating, or hierarchical relations, which means that for such intimacy to endure, fakirs must work with the complex ethical-political demands their plural attachments bring forth in the present. To the extent that "intimacy emphasizes relationality" (Wilson 2012, 27), it must also tackle the difference between forms of coming close and conditions of being intimate, not least the ways in which these are affectively sutured. Across its manifold forms, intimacy is a way of extending into the world in close companionship, be it through forms and orders of ritual, language, time, or sex. In a different project on queer intimacies and migrant feeling, I have noted how "intimacy is always pointing us, orienting us to certain kinds of becomings, beings, temporalities, not only in the moment it plays out but also how it impinges on us and the world afterwards, takes various afterlives so to speak" (Kasmani 2019b). Intimacy is futural insofar as it precludes certain ways of going forward, or illuminates the future's distinct potentials and possibilities, howsoever they are carried in the present or even if they are unrealized or eventually lost.

In a Sufi constellation, ideas of intimacy transact with notions of *suhbet* and *uns*. In literary terms, *uns* refers to feelings of love and affection or the effect of witnessing God's beauty. It can be regarded as a spiritual-affective condition whereby the heart becomes permeated by God's love. *Suhbet* on the other hand denotes companionship. It can refer to a saintly meeting or an assembly, a discourse, or conversation.[43] Not only that, Sufi texts and manuals have historically employed erotic language of passionate love and sexual union to describe how intimate bonds take shape between masters and disciples as well as to understand human encounters with the divine.[44] A sensuous and affective play between bodies is also traceable beyond the discursive. Pilgrims kissing Lal's tomb, women singing to the saint, men's shirtless torsos in flagellation, sick and seemingly possessed bodies, screaming, losing composure, and then regaining it—all of these are daily occurrences in Sehwan. Making offerings, ingesting substances, touching relics, dealing spirits, such *erotics of piety*, to lean on Finbarr B. Flood (2014), are in this book's view tied to the ordinary formation of saintly bonds. Intimacy, then, no matter how variously conceived or distinctly experienced, is conversant with sacrality all the same.

When it comes to fakir paths, it is important to consider how intimacy endures over time, which is to critically think how those in conditions of bonding, attachment, or companionship tarry with its dis/closures, especially when relations are continually haunted by the possibility of such ties coming undone. In other words, being drawn is not enough for drawing close. In Berlant's (1998, 281) terms, for intimacy to survive, it requires a persistent activity that can secure and stabilize conditions of closeness insofar as "the unavoidable troubles, the distractions and disruptions that make things turn out in unpredicted scenarios" are facts of intimacy. With regard to Sufi corporealities in medieval Persianate societies, Shahzad Bashir (2011, 107) has likewise noted that as much as being Sufi "implied that one had come under the spell of love," such being subjected to love meant being affected by turmoil, pain, and sorrow. In a close reading of a sixteenth-century Sufi poem, he elaborates how such love, more potent than any other force, acts upon and stirs up human beings so much that "those who fall in love are urged to take the long view of the situation since they have, by virtue of being smitten, entered the most worthwhile arena of human experience" (Bashir 2011, 110).[45] To be so possessed by love, to tarry with feeling this way, and to advance in stirred-up conditions over time figures my reading of intimacy with saints as a thing that broadens one's affective horizons as well as possibilities of life that might or might not realize in its wake. To tarry, as fakirs do in intimacy's bloom, is to linger in expectation, to remain in a situation, at times, longer than intended. It enfolds ideas of delay and waiting, feeling vexed, even hindered. It is as much to abide by a thing as it is to stay with its consequences. Thus, the book also tackles the question of what saintly bonds yield in their unfolding or how these obdurately endure in forward time: the hard learnings that evolve from drawing close to saints, the not knowing which histories such intimacies precisely involve or preclude, less so where one might be headed in such relationships. Fakir efforts and anxieties around saintly bonds and conditions of intimacy substantiate the position that individuals do not become fakirs in the sense that they become a thing and stay that way.

Qurb, a term I introduced earlier in relation to Zaheda's feeling of closeness, points to an always-evolving, never-stable feeling of being close, be it in terms of time, place, or relation. The online resource Urdu Lughat describes *qurb* as closeness in its visible, interiorized, spatial, and temporal dimensions.[46] So long as to be close is as much to be within reach

(of understanding or conception) as it is to be on the verge (of happening or completion), intimacy is the name I give to what blooms in that indistinct yet critical interstice between being near a thing and being nearly that thing. *Qurb* helps appreciate how and why fakir pursuits are not so much targeted at becoming the object itself, what Sufis would call *fana*, annihilation into the Truth, but rather at the cluster of promises such being critically intimate brings into view (Berlant 2011). Intimacy hangs on critical distance here. *Qurb* also denotes access, relation, and rank. And al-Qarib (the Near One in Arabic) is one of the many qualities by which God is known to Muslims: Allah is near by virtue of knowledge and awareness. To be close or *qarib* thus names a number of conditions: to be on the verge, to be distinct from others, to be within earshot of who one is intimate with, to be privy to exclusive knowledge and secrets. That love can be "a mode of being with God" (Ahmed 2016, 38) follows that affect refracted through intimacy in this work is not simply a structure of being physically near a saintly object; rather, it is by virtue of being-with, a felt mode of knowing, however slow, speculative, or indistinct such disclosures might be. Just as to be orientated around something "is not so much to take up that thing, as to be taken up by something" (Ahmed 2006, 116), *qurb* in saintly affective terms is a condition of slow revelation or refers to becoming progressively conscious in the wake of intimacy—wake also includes being awake (Sharpe 2016, 21). Though still distinct from saints, it is such being affectively sharp and perceptive that gives fakirs a reputation as guides who know better. What is however particularly queer about such affordances—something that emerges across life stories—is the not-fully-knowing the more-than-living object one commits to, is intimate with, or agrees to become embroiled with. Affective troubles are drawn not only from what fakirs abandon or turn away from but also, if not more so, because fakir relations with saintly figures are built upon uncertain communication, wound-up bonds, partial knowledge, the constant fear of the line being cut, as Zaheda once put it. More particularly in the case of Sehwan and given the abundant histories of Lal, some of which I recount in chapters 1 and 5, one might ask how such relations and intimacies are to endure when the saintly figure around which fakir desires are clustered is itself a slippery object in historical terms, knowable if at all through imaginal realms and felt registers? In fact, I take the position that in the different affective attachments of the fakirs to the figure of Lal, the saint is dynamically enacted not as one stable figure, but as multiple fragments and figurations. And yet, none of this is a case against intimacy but proof of its

mystical worth and value. Impeding as these are, partial histories, multiple narrations, dreams that require retelling and consultation, imprecise signals of sound or vision, bodily pain and cohabiting spirits, signs that must be read and interpreted are all felt ways in which fakirs know and do not know, remain hooked or are on the edge, become embroiled or tie themselves up in relations of affect with their mystical companions.

In an affective rendering of saintly ecologies of Delhi, Anand Taneja notes that kin-making with djinns, deities, saints, spirits, and talking animals highlight "the self's embeddedness in and constitution through a network of ties to the world" (2017, 115). He describes this as intimacy with the invisible (107–15). Rather fitting that *qarib* in its plural iteration *aqriba'* means relatives, that is, those near ones that we make kin with. Taneja's work draws keenly on Amira Mittermaier's notion of an *Elsewhere*. Tempering the emphasis on self-cultivation in the anthropology of Islam, Mittermaier proposes an ethics of relationality that "recognizes that humans are always embedded in webs of relationships" (2012, 249), more precisely, that the sphere of social relations also includes "the possibility of having personal relationships with (deceased) saints" (2008, 63).[47] In proceeding, I take the position that the very intimacy that winds up fakirs with saints in complex ethical-political relations ensures also that saints can have an affective stake in the world.[48] This means that we ought to account for, as part of a quotidian economy of affect, human-nonhuman knots, sacred enmeshments and historical affordances through which such relations are inclined to prosper in otherwise, off-the-cuff, and less-ordinary mobilizations (Stewart 2014, 121). This, what we might call *worlding with saints*, to lean on Kathleen Stewart, underscores not just the relational, allied, and interdependent character of fakir pursuits and saintly objects, but gestures also at how they make worlds out of such ties.[49] It helps figure the felt and enfleshed ways through which Sehwan's disguised histories and diversely sacred heritage is intimately mobilized into folds of a postcolonial Muslim present—a historical bloom, so to speak. For the most part, worlding with saints is a diffused notion in this book—taken up only in chapter 5—but it brings home the greater point that such queer companionships, risqué or troubling as these might be, are in fact also ordinary mobilizations conversant with the everyday ubiquity of saints and shrines in Pakistan.

An emphasis on fakir corporeality in this research recognizes that the ethics of intimacy and politics of orientation also endure in the materiality of the body, which is to say that for intimacy to matter, its inwardness must take outward and public forms.[50] It follows that fakirs, like *qalandar*s or

FIGURE I.4

A fakir woman passing by a street shrine in Sehwan, 2010.

those crooked-hat-wearing adherents of *madhhab-i 'ishq*, must be recognizable in order for them to validate a being beside norms. To live a fakir life is to undertake "a sustained and repeated corporeal project" (Butler 1988, 522). Fakir guises in Sehwan, abundantly detailed through the middle chapters, are coded through forms of costume, color, accessories, social behavior, and habitat (see fig. 1.4). Furthermore, insofar as to be fakir is to reorient the body to conform to a script or historical idea of ascetic poverty, one that is disproportionately if not exclusively male, structures and conditions of feeling close to saints are always already gendered. Even if fewer than men, women fakirs were never hard to come by in Sehwan. Also, some of my fakir interlocutors have in fact been gender-variant persons, whether intersex or transgender.[51]

On the radical possibilities of unmaking and remaking with saints, Anand Taneja (2017) has noted that a saint's shrine is a "place of becoming estranged from one's social identity." When it comes to fakirs of this book, such lines of *strange(r)ness*, to stay with Taneja's metaphor, solitary as these

might first seem, are in fact public paths of companionship. Saints make for queer companions not so much because they dislodge social relations or make them strange, but more so because they escort an abundance of relational possibilities that persevere so long as conditions of intimacy persist across affect-rich trails of yearning, seeking, dreaming, finding, and losing saints. In tarrying with saintly bonds, fakir relations to inherited objects are altered, whether these are objects of thought, feeling, and desire or involve life objectives, aims, and aspirations. Intimacy, thus, serves as "a conduit to understanding concrete force of abstract fields of power" (Wilson 2016, 248) when I describe how personal dreams and saintly visions become inseparable from desirous projections and infrastructures of the state, pulling dreamers away from domestic worlds to public shrines (chapter 1). It takes a precariously corporeal turn when women cohabit with spirits to partially remedy their historical exclusion from local systems of patrilineal charisma, or when fakir guises that signal, secure, and sustain conditions of saintly relations are thwarted by rival objects of love and desire (chapters 2 and 4). Fakir doubts and dilemmas, hopes and fears offer a sense of the affective terrain that *qurb* with saintly figures affords in emotional terms but also how fakirs continue with or in spite of it (chapter 3). Similarly, fakir inhabitation of saintly grounds brings them closer not only to rival beings—living, dead, or more-than-human—but also into intimate contact with alternate histories, imaginations, and futures of place (chapter 5). Together, these reaffirm the idea that intimacy has outward skins: its affordances texture inward feeling, public life, and historical being.

CON / TEXTS

In *Religious Affects*, Donovan Schaefer rewrites parameters for understanding religion. "Because affect constitutes the links between bodies and power," affect theory, he argues, is critical to mapping religion (Schaefer 2015, 9). At the same time, he notes that inheritances of religious studies can be vital to the exploration of affect (207). Unlike Schaefer's, my mandate is not as interceptive as "what gets called religion" or as poetic as "a way of feeling out religion" (Schaefer 2015, 207). Still, to some extent, this book, like Schaefer's, is driven by the will to excite a conversation where little exists. Queer, religious, and affect studies whose fields, texts, and contexts I

am here attempting to suture are new companions. Islamic lifeworlds I read and parse in this book, far less so. I am also aware that places like Sehwan, while emblematic of a particular kind of Islam in anthropology, do not strike us as sites of queer thinking. On the one hand, inheritances, crossings, borrowings, not least departures, shape the many contexts in which this book arrives. On the other, it informs the book's critical relation, a being *beside* with conversations in the anthropology of Islam, which remain largely if not comfortably oblivious to queer epistemologies. Such omissions are informed and maintained by the narrow view that queer is relevant only when researching sexualities in the Muslim world, if not also reduced to a minority hermeneutic reserved for LGBTQIA+ Muslims. A good case of such besideness is the book's companionship with Naveeda Khan's (2012) deliberation on Muslim becoming in Pakistan. Her thorough ethnographic work remains of broader contextual relevance to this project and her sophisticated argument on the dual dynamics of aspiration and skepticism mirror in a sense the open futures fakir lines are confronted with.[52] However, in limiting what she calls "scenes of striving" to theological disputations and mosque-related struggles, Khan relegates religious becoming to very straight settings that, despite their intra-Islamic diversity, eventually serve to exemplify and uphold a dominant if not weary narrative: Islam as the primary episteme for imagining Pakistan. Places like saints' shrines, ever-present in the Pakistani landscape, find no prominence in the scenes she describes; women and transgender individuals are effectively left outside concerns of futurity. In a limited sense, this work on saintly intimacy can be imagined as a queer companion to Khan's expansive project insofar as it brings fakir protagonists to the fore that are least likely to be read as futural or aspirational: An unchaperoned mother of eight who traverses a cross-country geography of shrines (chapter 3); an intersex child who abandons home on the inextricably entangled promise of dreams and the state (chapter 1); an ascetic who gives up celibacy for a girl he loves (chapter 4); a woman contesting place among tombs in a graveyard (chapter 5) or one holding audience in the men's prayer space at the shrine (chapter 2).

The importance of studying Sehwan is given precisely in its impetus to exhaust our categories of knowing. In the book's view, it is that place where Shiʻi figures, events, and temporalities are not exceptions or minor figurations but rather constitute an ordinary mobilization. To that extent, this book doesn't sit straight with the Sunni-centering drive of the anthropology of Islam, whose epistemologies are predominantly served by, if they have not also produced, an active minoritization of Islam's other

histories and lifeworlds. Even an erudite scholar such as Shahab Ahmed (2016) chooses to make no space for Shi'i aesthetic and affective forms in an otherwise stunning work that covers five centuries of Islamic cultures between Bengal and the Balkans. While Sufi worlds are engaged, he grossly undervalues Shi'i historical and cultural sources by dismissing them as "demographically minor" (Ahmed 2016, 104).[53] As a result, Karbala, an event pivotal to broader Islamic history and imagination as well as the aesthetic and affective forms that derive from it, is astonishingly left out of his argument on the importance of being Islamic. In the same measure, writings on saints' places in South Asia too often fail to accord Shi'i histories, beyond the descriptive, their rightful place in the analysis of shrine lifeworlds—Carla Bellamy's (2011) otherwise insightful book is a case in point. In such instances, the category Sufi serves to straighten, subsume, even silence irregular, antinormative, largely non-Sunni pasts through academic writing (Kasmani 2017a).

Whether Shi'i or Shivaite, Sunni or Sufi, Sehwan, despite its prominence, has only haltingly attracted the interest of studies on Pakistan.[54] Michel Boivin's (2011) long-standing scholarship comes to remedy such paucity. His study of relics and devotional artifacts attributed to Lal and his reading of shrine layouts, inscriptions, and ritual networks are particularly illuminating. He points to plural relations that objects build between realities, mundane and mystical, no less than the complex social and historical processes these attract and set into motion in the present. It has informed my stance that attachment to saints and their tombs, otherwise emblematic of ascetic self-mortification or unworlding, is complexly conversant with material realities so much that it is a means for becoming worldly in Sehwan.[55] Queer analytics of intimacy and futurity help bring the point home that fidelity to saints and their places is not always a recoiling from the worldly; instead, fakir labors in Sehwan constitute a purposeful coming close to saints. To the extent that fakir aspirations exceed mystical projects, the intimate scenes of striving I engage do not traffic in grand arguments around Islam or speculate on its place in the nation.[56] Moreover, the book's view that less-ordinary prospects of the public and the political are tied to forms of intimacy is aslant to dominant scholarly ways in which the relationship between Islam and the state has been imagined in the context of Pakistan.[57]

Though set in a pilgrimage town, the book's epistemic thrust extends beyond Islam or Pakistan insofar as it ruminates on how and why relations with saints or commitment to an ostensibly religious object are of value to

queer forms of thinking and world making. This also means that it must navigate a capacious zone between disinclined disciplines, a theme I take up in the coda to this book. If the anthropology of Islam is yet to open itself up to queer knowledge, methods, and sensibilities, queer and affect theory's by-and-large disregard for Islamic-religious fields and objects is comparable. The glaring absence of religion proper in work on public feelings or, for that matter, affect studies' geopolitical constitution within post-Fordist American cultural and political spheres speaks volumes for what areas and objects of study accrue value in relation to certain others.[58] As part of their critique of queer studies' geopolitics and analytical habits, its contemporary resolution and US-centering drive—true also for the canon of affect theory—Anjali Arondekar and Geeta Patel (2016, 152) indicate that non-Euro-American sources, settings, and epistemes, if and when invoked, appear only as exemplars, never as sites of theory making. At the same time, scholarship that takes intersections of Islam and same-sex desire seriously is relatively new.[59] The mandate of this book, however, is distinct from its forerunners in that it is set beside sexuality. It also ventures beyond the metropole and engages queer hermeneutics, not in a reparative spirit, neither as tools for queering Islam. Its intellectual labors are rather concerned with engaging diversely sacred aesthetics, Islamic-spiritual inheritances, and religious affect, which is one way of seeking other histories of queer and a mode I here regard as reading queer religiously. This doesn't entail a frenzy of finding one in the other—Islamizing queer or queering Islam—but involves the intricate task of exploring a companionship such that scholars' categories, religion and queer, can remain in creative suspense or question at least their historical disinclination (see coda). Such reading incites a troubling of religion as a nondefinable, Eurocentric, and colonialist category in much the same vein as it imagines queerness in more-than-rights-based, nonmetropolitan, extrasecular, and beside Euro-American cultural terms. It follows that fakir lives in this book are not confirmations of queer presence elsewhere but orientations in and of themselves. Their stories in this book stretch defined and habituated figurations of religion, while remaining oblique to the genealogies and inheritances of queer itself. Sehwan likewise is not mere exemplar for queer theory nor simply discursive context. It is also a critical geography, a meeting ground where fakir lives cross and epistemological paths emerge.

Queer Companions pairs its protagonists, person and place. Every chapter is tied to a particular location in town, underscoring the importance

of lived context and local ecologies. The various settings I introduce in sequence—grove, shrine, courtyard, lodge, and graveyard—constitute a geography of intimacy that unfolds through the pages (see map I.1). The book's journey takes us from affinities in image to dis/affection of saints of the state, from intimacies that take hold in song and dream to close cohabiting with spirits and the dead. Such material is diversely collected, organized as life stories, interwoven through various settings, and sequenced into chapters as a way to illustrate the situated ways in which fakirs make worlds out of saintly relations in Sehwan. Thus, what also worlds through the various life stories I present in this book is an unstraight telling, evoking feeling and knowing, always inflected, continually affected.

"Take with you what you can and leave the rest," a fakir once reprimanded me for having suggested that I record our conversation using a mechanical device. He looked visibly upset. I knew from my experience with other fakirs that the use of the recorder often reduced the quality of conversations and affected their styles of narrating. Similarly, Murad, a fakir at a local lodge whose company I used to regularly seek, thought I asked too many questions. He had rather poetically suggested an alternative: "Make it a habit to sit by the sea and it shall itself reveal the secrets unto you." I had taken such advice, though I strived as I learned to adjust to a different kind of method of being around fakirs, one that was not interrogative yet still engaging, less urgent while more oriented toward open outcomes. Interviews did not always yield explicit information. There was hardly ever a clear answer, I worried. Fakirs spoke in very complex and abstract ways. Some even refused to talk about intimate matters, either because they feared a sense of pride might get in the way or because certain secrets were best not disclosed to the uninitiated. Over time and in the company of fakirs, the default method shifted to impromptu conversations and sessions of exchange that transpired unrecorded. Hanging out with fakirs while being skillfully observant demanded more than just being present in a given context or situation (Geertz 1998, 69). As I moved from interviews to conversations, from inquiry to sharing space and time, from recording devices to reflexive processes, I was able to gain a sense of how fakirs pulled together their orientation to extraordinary realms in continuity with the mundane and the everyday. I was equally exposed to moments of tension and enjoyment, privy to everyday gossip and pranks.

This book is based on fifteen months of fieldwork. Three early field visits took me to Sehwan in 2009 and 2010, each lasting around four weeks.[60] However, more concentrated long-term fieldwork was carried out in two

Chapter 5
Graveyard

Chapter 4
Lodge

Old Fortress

Shrine of Bodlo

Chapter 3
Courtyard

Shrine of Lal

Chapter 2
Shrine

Indus River

Chapter 1
Grove

Lal-bagh

N

0   0.15 0.3   0.6   0.9   1.2

Chapter Settings
Built up Area
Graveyards & Cemeteries
Roads
Railway Tracks

Cultivated Land
Uncultivated Land
Wasteland
Canals

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phases. One lasted six months, from September 2011 to February 2012; the other was of three months' duration, between June and August 2012. I returned for a month in November 2013 and finally for three weeks in February 2018.[61] I thought it important to document the changes, especially relevant in light of the suicide bomb attack at the shrine a year earlier. The fact that our interactions spread over nine years and across several field stays of varying durations has made it possible to think of fakir lives not only as they unfolded in the present or in my presence but in relation to what had been left behind and what was to subsequently unfold. The working out of a single life narrative from different points in their lives but also the changing life of the town captures the varying and time-inflected ways in which fakirs bring meaning to their life choices, circumstances, and experiences or to particular events and processes. Women fakirs, in my experience, were especially skilled at recounting their lives and struggles in the presence of others, perhaps also because narrativizing was integral to the gendered making of spiritual authority (see Pechilis 2012; Flueckiger 2003; see also chapter 2). While fakir accounts of the present were rich in content and dense with metaphor, many found it arduous to speak of their distant pasts in any great detail. The telling or the withholding of stories, their different iterations over the years, and the narrative strategies with which such pasts were made accessible to me were equally important material to consider because "composing stories about oneself," even when it involves significant erasures, is a creative act, and "oral testimonies are, in the end, stories that people tell about themselves" (Sarkar 2012, 593). Challenges around accessing histories have also meant, wherever necessary, an assembling of accounts, anecdotes, field notes, and vignettes to form biographical semblances requiring both time and repeated, consistent engagements with my interlocutors.

The main language of research in the field has been Urdu. An advanced access to Sindhi, Seraiki, and Punjabi has helped me gain a sense beyond the scope of interviews and one-on-one conversations while improving my chances for participating in group interactions. The language of the field diary was, however, predominantly English. While my first re-

port of interactions and interviews is already an account in translation, I exercised care so as to record significant statements, direct quotations, or concepts in the original. Carefully assembled oral fakir accounts, even if not recorded as one coherent biographical interview on a mechanical device, form the basis of each of the chapters in this book. While fakirs are primary protagonists, they are not the only interlocutors in this research.[62] Interactions in the field have included interviews, conversations, and participant observation with pilgrims and residents, shrine officials and contract workers, local intellectuals and sayyid custodians, ritual specialists and shopkeepers, gurus and their disciples, and, when possible, spouses and family members of fakirs. Wherever beneficial, sources such as print literature, newspaper reports, devotional songs, images, and legends are also incorporated as well as a limited number of colonial historical records, which help situate and read the contemporary conflicts around questions of change, the arbitration of authorities, and everyday management of the shrine and its resources. Fieldwork involved a brief stint at the Sindh Archives in Karachi as well as short visits to various shrines and holy sites associated with Lal and other prominent saints in Sindh and Punjab.

As a cis-male researcher, I had access to most public spaces as well as fakir lodges and sayyid households. At times, it limited my interactions in settings associated with female publics. The privilege I drew by virtue of my social class and urban disposition, not least the saint's favor and the serious intellectual purpose ascribed to me in the field, sometimes remedied gendered anxieties around my contact with women fakirs and pilgrims, especially in the shrine premises.[63] I have, in many instances, benefited from my knowledge of local customs and languages, puns, metaphors, and references. That said, urban-rural disparities, difference in discourse and education, and class-determined character of social experience mean that I am complexly and multiply located vis-à-vis the field and my interlocutors—possibly a *halfie* anthropologist.[64] While I may not be termed a complete stranger—"scholarly participants . . . who while remaining of the faith and sharing in the benefits of an insider's knowledge of the beliefs and practices of the community" (Knott 2005, 247)—the kind of religious emotion I have encountered in Sehwan is quite distinct from my own experience of the same faith, an affective distance that I have already described in some detail. It is also true that for the earlier part of the fieldwork, I remained estranged from the most quotidian aspects of Sehwan's ritual life. For instance, I did not at first partake of offerings made to the saint and

INTRODUCTION

was slow to fully observe ritual customs related to the shrine. Or that despite many adjustments and learnings over the years, I did not once participate in performances like *dhamal* and *matam* (drumming and ritual flagellation). Similarly, I chose not to consume any intoxicants, which is a common feature of fakir life in Sehwan, especially when fakirs gather in small groups and share a joint or *bhang*, a freshly prepared beverage made from cannabis leaves. In withholding, I was clearly marking myself, but I was also already distinguished in other ways, especially by virtue of class-based markers like dress, diction, and the very practice of academic research. The thing is that insider-ness is not necessarily more beneficial than nor superior to other positions and conditions of access; it also requires methodological work, especially to ensure that one is not doubly impeded by the assumptions a researcher may make of shared meanings or by those that are made about the researcher (Armitage and Gluck 2002, 79). In short, limitations of scope, access, and method present the contingencies and conditions under which this ethnography is written and lays out the intersubjective processes at play rather than claiming positions of (better) knowledge and objectivity.

The book's analytical choice of reading fakir life stories as they unfold in close correspondence with their places of dwelling helps bolster the idea that unstraight affordances of intimacy are individually inflected, locally shaped, and historically conversant. The opening chapter, which is set in a grove outside town, centers on the life-altering journey of an intersex fakir. Weaving the state in and out of a single life story, the chapter takes the provocative position that saintly intimacies occurring in dream are contoured by material-affective measures of the state, a framework I describe as infrastructures of the imaginal. It also reflects on the changing life and times of the shrine itself as well as the history of the saint. Chapter 2 takes the reader from the seclusion of a grove to the center of action. Situated in the audience hall (durbar) of the shrine of Sehwan, "Her Stories in His Durbar" revolves around the questionable authority of a woman fakir in a men's prayer space. Drawing on the intersecting politics of local sayyid authority and shrine administration, it explores how publicly governed shrines serve as intimate settings for women, whose extradomestic forays and less-normative spiritual careers are arbitrated in the company of the saint and the state. It also illustrates how an embodiment of motherhood comes to partially remedy women's exclusion from patrilineal charisma in Sehwan or how it hinges on the affective narrativization of mystical endurance. As a pair, the first two chapters weave in the history and political

economy of the shrine. These establish how desires of the state are implicated in saintly projects or the greater conditions of governing with saints under which saintly intimacies are fostered or impaired.

The succeeding two chapters turn to the work of becoming intimate or bodily labor that is required to sustain place alongside saints, especially the emotional crises that loom about such exceptional decisions and situations. Centering on the spiritual career of a woman in the shrine courtyard, chapter 3 traces the gendered and affective troubles she faces in a time of impending failure. "In Other Guises, Other Futures" draws on the fakir concept of dis/guise to argue how being close to saints perseveres in bodied ways, tarries through feeling, and warrants a contingent publicness. It is a moving account that ties affordance with endurance in altering conditions of intimacy. It ruminates on the durational passage of intimacy as well as the affective labors it takes to continue with or without saintly relations. Going further, "Love in a Time of Celibacy" follows in the aftermath of a scandal in a men's-only fakir lodge. Reading across saintly and sexual intimacy, the chapter illustrates how being in the service of saints takes specific corporeal forms. It contends that saintly bonds, however secure in ritual terms, can come undone or show signs of disaffection, especially when saintly fields are thwarted by rival objects of desire. Chapter 5 is set in a graveyard. Through a twin account of contesting place, "Worlding Fakirs, Fairies, and the Dead" takes the position that fakir worlds are heterotemporal imbrications that alongside the saint feature the dead and the more-than-living, mythic creatures and spiritual beings. This, the chapter argues, leans into a worlding whereby fakirs, by virtue of their intimacy with saints, mobilize the place's multiple, contested, or unresolved histories into the present and, at the same time, embed themselves in long-standing affective textures of place. Finally, in the coda to this book, I take up the epistemological prospects that underlie a possible companionship between the study of religion and queer theory. I enfold the various findings that are brought to bear across all five chapters while folding out the politics that underlie my reading of the material. "Queer Forward Slash Religion" reflects on what we might do to gainfully read religious lifeworlds, not with the purpose of queering or queer-jacketing them, but rather with the sensibilities and skills to read queer religiously.

This book, like its fakir protagonists, arrives through forms of coming close and crossing far. A few months ahead of the summer of 2009, in a long-distance phone call from London, I shared with my mother plans for a research stay in Sehwan as part of a master's degree program in Muslim

Cultures. In the fraction of silence that stretched between my telling and her response, "What do shrines have to do with Islam?" was a geography of distance. Whether the saint embraced me or I embraced Sehwan, the photograph my mother would object to many years later is after all witness to labors of coming close, crossing far. In a sense, this writing captures an entire decade of arriving and departing, staying, coming to know and not knowing enough. Questions of intimacy I center in this research are somewhere, somehow also inflected by my own coming to terms with distance, physical and emotional. Or the queer affects I identify in relation to fakir lives are in part to make sense of all that I might have stirred, upended, or given up in the wake of coming close to Sehwan. Theoretical labors put aside, all scholarly citations taken away, what remains at the heart of this book are stories of coming close, ways of worlding shared with me over the years, some also as parting gifts. Through the labor of writing lives and piecing together biographical fragments, I am constantly reminded of the limitations I face in terms of access and material: the temporal character of life itself as well as the constructed-ness of the ethnography as a genre. Like the biographer, to borrow Benjamin Moser's (2014) words, the anthropologist too, "in the face of the sprawling chaos of an entire life," brings coherence where little might exist and must remain all the more aware that whatever gets told is but a small selection, one that fits a particular construction and serves a specific intellectual logic. Murad, the same fakir who suggested I ask less questions, also told me that he wants to be like me, "an explorer who travels to new locations," not to record stories of others, as he described my work to be, but to write his own story. Somewhere between crossing far and coming close, along labors of finding, accessing, composing, and telling fakir stories in, across, and between these pages, I hope to have found a story of my own to tell.

Introduction

1 Some scholars prefer *faqir* (from its Arabic root *faqr*). My interlocutors in Sehwan have additionally defined the term in relation to *fikr*, meaning thought and reflection.

2 My reading of intimacy as an interface of public and private worlds learns from existing scholarship but is made distinct by virtue of its religious formations and archives. On the entanglements of imperial and intimate formations or the ways in which sexual arrangements and colonial governance corresponded in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Indonesia, see Stoler (2010). On understandings of intimacy within liberal logics of settler colonies in the United States and Australia, see Povinelli (2006).

3 *Queer* is neither a figure of identity politics in this work nor an exclusive reference to my interlocutors' sexualities.

4 For more on intersections of queer theory and religion, see Schippert (2005, 2011), Wilcox (2009).

5 *Lal* (red, dear one) or *La'l* (ruby, gem), though different words and both ascribed to the saint, are indistinguishable in Sehwan since there is no difference in pronunciation.

6 According to the provisional data of the 2017 census, the population of greater Sehwan including neighboring villages was about 269,291 people, out of which 104,239 were town residents.

7 On Bodlo's shrine and his importance for fakir devotion, see chapter 4.

8 My childhood in the 1980s was synonymous with top-down Islamization

during the military dictatorship of General Zia. Regressive legislative measures like shariah courts, state-sanctioned persecution of Ahmedis, and women's social marginalization through the infamous Hudood Ordinances were introduced.

9   For hierarchies of divine friendship, see Bashir (2011, 85–95). For a detailed study on Islamic saints as friends of God, see Renard (2008).

10   Critiques of saint veneration find ordinary circuiting through religious sermons, popular literature, television serials, men's reformist gatherings, and women's domestic prayer circles, also via social media platforms (see also Malik 1998).

11   For more on Islamic arguments and debate in Pakistan, see Marsden (2005), Sökefeld (1999), Metcalf (1987). On Islamic mysticism in South Asia, see Bennett and Ramsey (2012), Green (2012b), Rozehnal (2007), Ernst (1992, 1997). On Sufism and society, see Curry and Ohlander (2012).

12   Ahl-e Hadis is a religious reform movement that emerged in northern India in the mid-nineteenth century. Most Pakistanis identify with the Hanafi school of jurisprudence while maintaining an adherence to the Barelvi or Deobandi movements of religious reform in South Asia. On Islamic piety movements and the Tablighi Jamaat in Pakistan, see Khan (2016, 2018), Metcalf (1998, 2002); for sectarianism in Pakistan, see Zaman (1998). On Shi'i religious identity in contemporary Pakistan, see Fuchs (2019).

13   *Futurity* is distinct from *future* (temporality) in that it refers to the capacity of a thing to advance and endure in forward time.

14   On women and Sufi healing, see Bellamy (2011), Callan (2008), Flueckiger (2006); on performances of ritual drumming and *dhamal*, see Frembgen (2012a) and Wolf (2006); on Sufi literature, devotional music, and narrative, see Mir (2006), Abbas (2002), Qureshi (1986); on devotional objects and images, see Frembgen (2012b), Boivin (2011), Flood (2009), Zaidi (2009). For Sufi emotion and embodiment, see Werbner and Basu (1998); on Sufi shrines, see Strothmann (2016), Currie (1989), Troll (1989), Kurin (1983), Eaton (1982). For pilgrimage, see Boivin (2012a), Werbner (2003).

15   Meaning way or path, *tariqat* forms the second in a four-stage journey of the Sufi: *shari'at*, *tariqat*, *ma'rifat*, *haqiqat*.

16   Women's public circumstances are less suspect at shrines, tempered by the dual protection of the saint and the state. On Pakistani women's spheres, see Ring (2006), Ahmed (2005), Grima (2004). On middle-class piety among women in Pakistan, see Maqsood (2017); on women and religious revivalism in Pakistan, see Ahmad (2009).

17   This refers to the West Pakistan Waqf Properties Ordinance (1959). For more on *auqaf* in Pakistan, see Ibad (2019), Philippon (2016), Strothmann (2016), Malik (1990). For crossovers of Sufi pilgrimage, shrine markets, and political economy in Sehwan, see Delage (2018).

18   As descendants of the Prophet, sayyids enjoy historical, material, and spiritual privilege unlike other spiritual figures in Sehwan; see chapter 2. On religious

and political authority of sayyids in South Asia, see Fuchs (2020), Gautier and Levesque (2020), Ansari (1992).

19 More than twenty-five shrines have been targeted since 2005 (Ibad 2019, introduction). On the tragedy at Sehwan, see Kasmani (2017c).

20 For guidance and discipleship at an Indian shrine, see Pinto (2006); see Raj and Harman (2006) for vow making at South Asian shrines.

21 See chapter 2. On women and spirits in South Asia, see Bellamy (2008), Callan (2008), Gold (1988).

22 Digby particularly refers to the Delhi sultanate during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.

23 A world order whereby the Sufi and the sultan are both kings necessitates the division of their spheres of authority; for more, see Anjum (2011). On saints, communal conflict, and interfaith harmony, see Bigelow (2010).

24 Christina Sharpe's multifold notion of "the wake" depicts the ways in which transatlantic chattel slavery is "an event that is still ongoing" (2016, 20). She proposes a staying in the wake, "a form of consciousness," under prevailing conditions of Black non/being (15).

25 For affordance in design, see Norman (1988, 1999); for approaches to materiality, see Bauer (2019), Knappet (2004); on affordance and terrorism, see Taylor (2012).

26 He observes this for affordances that relate to animals and other persons.

27 My use of *queer* and *unstraight*, each with its own distinct capacities, is not to distinguish between what is properly queer or not, sexual or otherwise.

28 She evokes the Islamic notion of *sirat-e-mustaqim*, a guiding principle that informs the notion of living an ethical life in her discussion on gender/sex change in Iran.

29 For the emergence of *qalandar* as a trope in Sufi poetry, see Ewing (2006, 233–39). For *qalandar* groups in South Asia, see Digby (1984).

30 On renunciation and social deviance, see Karamustafa (2006, 13–23).

31 *Qalandar*s as a distinct group of deviant dervishes formed in the thirteenth century. Their existence as a mode of religiosity is evidenced in Persian literature (*qalandar* as topos) and Sufi theoretical treatises as early as the eleventh century; see Karamustafa (2006, 32).

32 For more on affective texture, posture, and situatedness, see Slaby (2020).

33 Custodian families in Sehwan take the position that the saint's actual name was most likely Shah Hasan and not Usman, the latter commonly associated with the Sunni. The title Lal Shahbaz as reference to the saint is first recorded in late seventeenth-century textual sources (Boivin 2011, 20). For a detailed biography of the saint (in French), see Boivin (2012b).

34 According to the Suhrawardi Sufi tradition, the saint was initiated in Multan by Baha'uddin Zakaria (Boivin 2011, 18). Boivin (2012b, 105) notes that custodians in Sehwan claim a loose affiliation with some Qadiri strands though no formal initiations into the order are made. For more on the saint's history, see chapter 1.

35 Available archaeological evidence does not confirm the claim (see Collinet 2008). However, historians believe that overlaps are likely (see Boivin 2011, 96; Schimmel 2003, 355).

36 According to *Tarikh Mazhar Shahjahani*, a seventeenth-century account of Sindh translated from Persian into Urdu (Namkin [1634] 2009, 160), on the eve of the festival Shivratri, every Hindu man and woman of Sehwan would bathe at Chhoti Nali, one of the springs associated with the saint on the outskirts of town.

37 According to Boivin (2012b, 43), the Indus was worshipped under the name Udero Lal, depicted as an incarnation of Varuna, the Vedic deity of waters. Other references include Amar Lal, Darya Shah, Darya Nath, Zinda pir, Shaykh Tahir, and the Quranic figure (Khwaja) Khizr. For more on Jhule Lal, see Parwani (2010), Khan (2008).

38 Boivin (2008, 37) refers to the Chinese pilgrim Huein Tsang's seventh-century account, which portrays Sehwan as a stronghold of the Shivaite sect Pashupatas before the region's Arab conquest at the beginning of the eighth century. Arab geographers have called it Sadusan and Siwistan (variants: Shiv-asthan, Shiv-astano). The British Army engineer and archaeological surveyor Alexander Cunningham identifies Sehwan as Sindomana, one of two places mentioned in the time of Alexander's conquest. He notes that the Greek name Saindhuwan (or the abode of the Saindhavas) is the origin of the name Sehwan (Cunningham 1871, 266). For historical accounts of Sindh, see Asif (2016), Cook (2008), Khuhro (1981), Burton (1851), Burnes (1837).

39 In his address to the annual conference at the saint's fair in November 1969, Sindhi nationalist leader G. M. Syed (2012) traced features of shrine ritual and fakir practices to Shivaite forms.

40 For a historical sketch of the shrine, see chapter 2.

41 For a complex and considered relationship between Sufi and Shivaite in Sehwan, see Boivin (2008).

42 In her book *The Powerful Ephemeral*, Carla Bellamy (2011) describes as "ambiguously Islamic" those Muslim shrines that have complex religious histories and involve an interfaith following.

43 For more on *suhbet*, see the coda.

44 For Sufi masters and disciples, see Bashir (2011), Malamud (1996); for homoerotic desire in Sufi contexts, see Mian (2019), Kugle (2007); for intimacy in Sufi discourse, see Shaikh (2012).

45 The poem he refers to is "The Qualities of Lovers" by Hilali Jaghatai (d. 1529).

46 See Urdu Lughat, http://www.udb.gov.pk/, accessed March 2021.

47 She notes that saintly dreams and visions expand spheres of action to an Elsewhere, affective ties and dialogic relations that remind believers "of the very condition of being with and continuously being acted upon" (Mittermaier 2012, 253; see also Mittermaier 2011). On affective politics across religious contexts, Kasmani et al. (2020) note that engagements with the Elsewhere always involve an unsettling of the here and now.

48   Intimacy harbors consequences for all parties involved. Donna Haraway
     speaks of companion species and poses the question, "How is *becoming with* a
     practice of becoming worldly?" (2008, 35). Such *becoming with* ties and reties
     partners through reciprocal action and affection, in her terms, attachment
     sites of world making.

49   The gerund *worlding* shifts attention from world as an extant thing to a gener-
     ative ontological process (for more, see Stewart 2010, 2014; Haraway 2008).

50   On the inwardness and publicness of intimacy, see Berlant (1998, 281).

51   Gender-variant persons in Sehwan refer to themselves in varying registers,
     like *khadra* (in Sindhi), *khwaja-sara* (in Urdu), or simply *fakir*. My research
     with such fakirs is better detailed in an article that discusses transgender poli-
     tics in Pakistan (see Kasmani 2021).

52   Some of my earlier work has engaged her notion of becoming, from which I
     have since turned away (see Kasmani 2016b, 2017b).

53   The term *Shi'i* is so gingerly present in the book that it doesn't even appear
     in the index. He notes that adducing non-Sunni examples is not antithetical
     to the project; however, he explains his deliberate choice of Sunni sources
     in these words: "I have done this simply for the pragmatic reason that I do
     not want to facilitate the facile objection that I am conceptualizing Islam
     on the basis of marginal or non-representative phenomena" (Ahmed 2016,
     104).

54   Scholarly focus on Sehwan is fairly recent. For notable examples, see Ortis
     (2017, 2020), Kasmani (2012, 2015, 2017b, 2019a), Delage (2018), Jaffer (2018),
     Frembgen (2012a). Frembgen's (2011) book offers reflections and field notes
     from Sehwan's annual pilgrimage. For works in French, see Ortis (2019),
     Delage (2016), Boivin (2012b). For publications in Sindhi, see Kandhro (2011),
     Advani (2010), K.-M. Sehwani (2009), Abbasi (2002).

55   For asceticism and renunciation in broader South Asia, see DeNapoli (2014),
     Salgado (2013), Khandelwal (2004), Burghart (1983).

56   Nile Green (2012b, 2) has noted that privileging of the mystical neglects the
     social and overlooks Sufi investment in the tangible realm of physicality. For
     comparable critiques on the piety turn in the anthropology of Islam, see Mit-
     termaier (2012), Schielke (2010), Soares and Osella (2009).

57   See, for example, Fuchs (2019), Haq (2019), Ibad (2019), Philippon (2016),
     Strothmann (2016), Khan (2012), Jalal (2000), Ansari (1992), Malik (1990).

58   For religion in Ann Cvetkovich's work, see Schaefer (2015, 109–11).

59   Notable examples include Scott Kugle's (2007) monograph on saints' bodies
     and desire, the study of sexual diversity in the Muslim world by Vanja Hamzić
     (2016), and the volume *Islamicate Sexualities* edited by Babayan and Naj-
     mabadi (2008).

60   A first fieldwork was carried out in the framework of my master's degree proj-
     ect at the Institute for the Study of Muslim Civilisations in London. I returned
     subsequently in 2009 and 2010 as part of the French Interdisciplinary Mission
     in Sindh led by Michel Boivin. To work around my limitations in accessing his

works in French, I spent a few days in Chambéry, France, to interview Michel Boivin in July 2013.

61 I mostly stayed at the rest house of the Department of Antiquities, Sindh.

62 The greater material involves twenty-four fakirs, an almost equal number of men and women and a few transgender persons. This included resident, visiting, and journeying fakirs that I met and interviewed on a regular basis.

63 During my first stay, I relied on my friend Marvi Mazhar to facilitate access to women at the shrine. My presence among women drew less attention over time.

64 See Narayan (1993, 673). For positionality and dynamics in the field, see Kalir (2006), Bloch (1998), Abu-Lughod (1990). On fieldwork and travel, see Clifford (1996).

1. Infrastructures of the Imaginal

Sections of chapter 1 appeared in "Pilgrimages of the Dream: On Wings of State in Sehwan Sharif, Pakistan," in *Muslim Pilgrimage in the Modern World*, ed. Babak Rahimi and Peyman Eshagi (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2019), 133–48.

1 Death anniversaries of saints are celebrated in Pakistan, marking their union with the divine. These are called 'urs (Arabic for *wedding*) or simply *mela* in Sehwan, meaning fair. For impressions of Sehwan's annual fair, see Frembgen (2011), Passow (2005).

2 According to Michel Boivin (2011, 20), it is in late seventeenth-century textual sources that the title "Lal Shahbaz" as reference to the saint is first recorded.

3 For more on dreams and the imaginal, see Mittermaier (2011), Corbin (1997), Chittick (1993, 1994).

4 In rendering Baba's story in English, I adopt the gender-neutral pronouns *they*, *them*, *their* to record Baba's distinct subjectivity. When speaking, Baba interchangeably relied on feminine and masculine speech registers.

5 On the role of dreams in Sufi contexts, see Mittermaier (2011), Ewing (1990, 2006), Green (2003).

6 On dreams and visions, Anand Taneja refers to *elsewhen* or "times other than the contemporary moment" (2017, 60).

7 For more on intersections of the ghostly and the temporal in Islamic South Asia, see Taneja (2017), Khan (2006).

8 For comparable insights, see Kasmani (2019a).

9 For a different discussion on the lyrical and the political, see Kasmani (2017a).

10 In a study of shrines of Awrangabad, India, he identifies the dual spheres in which saintly places existed in the seventeenth century, spanning their discursive and material dimensions.

11 From the construction and survey report titled "Redevelopment of the Mazar of Hazrat Lal Shahbaz Qalandar at Sehwan Sharif." No date of publication is