PROOF

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Temporal Nonconformity

Being There Together as *Khwajasara* in a Time of One's Own

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"Here in Pakistan, we say *khwajasara*," Kajol, an office clerk, told me, sitting upright in the relative comfort and safety of the quarters of a nongovernmental organization she worked for, walled off and tucked away in a sleepy middle-class neighborhood of Lahore. "We become *khwajasara* when a spirit, called *murid,* enters us," she continued, placing her hand gently on her chest. "Once *murid* is within oneself, one feels very special about oneself and then one can consider oneself *khwajasara*" (Hamzić 2016, 156; Hamzić 2019, 49).[1] We become, when, once, then . . . These markers of an identitary process, of being "initiated into a temporal life of language" (Butler 1997, 2), and community, meant then, for Kajol—as they mean still and as they had meant before for members of her gender-nonconforming collective—a dis/orienting experience transgressing the sedimented notions of linearity and progress in time. Christian but partaking in *khwajasara* cosmology (which was, in turn, firmly located within the larger, popular Punjabi, Indic, and Muslim hieropraxis), born into a "low caste," yet resituated within *khwajasara*'s own kinship system and a whirlwind of recent legal and civil society developments, Kajol was living her life within and between different temporalities. Having a spirit within herself, a community—often described as "traditional" in contradistinction with the emergent trans and queer senses of the self in Pakistan—and a "respectable" job, she embodied an increasingly complex web of temporal

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directions, which characterize contemporary *khwajasara* lifeworlds, but are also, as we shall see, seemingly inextricable from *khwajasara* self-hood across time.

While this communal designation, also transliterated as *khwaja sira* or *khawaja sira*, of a feminine-presenting, gender-binary-defying South Asian subjectivity—more widely known as *hijra* (pl. *hijre*)—is nowadays peculiar to Pakistan, it conjures up and re/memorializes a much longer and wider Muslim and subcontinental past. *Khwajasara* of today claim an etiological link with *khwājasarāʾ* or *khwājasarāʾī* of yore, who were often designated male at birth but then castrated in their youth before being sold into Muslim imperial or other elite service. [2] As their Persian title suggests, *khwājasarāʾ* ordinarily, though not exclusively, served as guardians of the secluded women's quarters (*zanāna*) at the Mughal and other South Asian courts. Twenty-first-century Pakistani *khwajasara* see this as their own past. As Bindiya Rana, a Karachi-based *khwajasara* leader, once told me, "We even have certain documents of our *khwajasara* ancestors, when they received some tip or a reward from the Mughal emperor" (Hamzić 2016, 162). However, such claims have been largely dismissed as tenuous, not least because of the coexistence of elite—if oft troubled and derided for their "lack of manliness"—*khwājasarāʾ* and the supposedly "less dignified" *hijṛā* subjectivity throughout much of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the latter ostensibly more resembling the contemporary *hijre*, including Pakistani *khwajasara* (Hinchy 2013, 8; Hinchy 2014, 277; Hinchy 2019, 23, 28, 148, 260).

In a similar manner, *khwajasara*'s pursuits of their own presents and futures are increasingly threatened by the enterprising gaze of neoliberal futurism (Pamment 2019b, 141–51; Mokhtar 2020) as well as neoconservative "rescue" operations, seeking to extirpate *khwajasara* from their larger networks of solidarity and sociality, labeled by such operations as "lesbian, gay, and bisexual persons whose claim of rights has deeply divided societies" (Farhat et al. 2020, 31). Each relying on a crude, universalizing use of transgender, albeit for different purposes, these disciplining attempts espouse what Elizabeth Freeman (2010, xxii, 3) has referred to as "chrononormativity," or the hegemonic use of time to organize individual and collective human bodies toward certain elite goals, be it late capitalist "maximum productivity" or a forcibly homogenous time of the nation-state. The result is a *stretch* in *khwajasara*'s own temporal and communal practices, a disorienting demand in language, social and political life to conform to either the insipid nationalized notions of respectability

(*sharafat*) or to what Aniruddha Dutta and Raina Roy (2014) described as "the expanding category of transgender" in South Asia (320), in need of decolonization and dissent (Dutta 2019, 2). [3]

Such a stretch can cause damage—it can *distemporalize.* In a different context, Safet HadžiMuhamedović and I (HadžiMuhamedović and Hamzić 2019) have described distemporalization as a project of denial of time—a denial of historicity, futurity, or change, which is a significant element of various constructions of "otherness." We have also taken distemporality to signify a refusal of, and intervention into, qualitatively specific temporal lifeworlds, such as that of *khwajasara*. And, as with the conscription into a politics of *sharafat* or a commodified, docile, "recolonizing" notion of transgender, such projects usually include a demand for a retemporalization into another "world," be it of globalized gender regimes or an illusory "respectable" Pakistan. [4]

This chapter engages the temporality of *khwajasara* communal experience by examining not only the processes of distemporalization but also a variety of ways in which this Pakistani gender-nonconforming subjectivity has shared in the larger South Asian and Muslim memories and performance of gender and sexuality, while forging alongside a space and a time of their own. I have sought elsewhere (Hamzić 2019) to account for the specifically spatial aspects of *khwajasara* political, social, familial, and spiritual lives, focusing on *thereness*—a property of dwelling with kindred souls—such lives would entail. But, as I now argue, being there together for *khwajasara* has also meant a great deal of idiosyncratic, multidirectional time-making—oriented toward the pasts, the presents, the futures, and sometimes altogether different temporalities—often at odds with the time-making in their wider sociopolitical environments. This chapter revisits several tell-tale instances of such temporal diversity and nonconformity, asking how those relate to *khwajasara* knowledge-production about the self and the world in thereness and, also, in what ways they could contribute to the growing concern with temporality in critical subjectivity studies.

First, I turn to *khwājasarāʾ* and *hijṛā* historical subjectivities to account for the distemporalizing effects as well as some potentially productive tensions between present-day *khwajasara* and *hijra* views of the(ir) past and those of the(ir) historians. One needs to question whom such temporal interventions are *for* and how they travel, in meaning and intent, in a historical "post-ness" (Freeman 2010, xiv) of empire, colonial modernity, and Orientalism, or when rendered into a history of the present—a critical endeavor

that recognizes as futile any (empiricist) struggle to hold the meaning of gender and sexuality in place (Scott 2011, 1–22). Second, I briefly examine a site of *khwajasara*'s present/future-making. At this site, *khwajasara* are literally made part of another, virtual world, but find ways to disrupt or "rewire" such transformation. There, as Omar Kasmani (2021) avers, an "ongoing futuring" (99) takes place, in which "not only locally specific meanings around gender variability are being pushed out and projected anew" (98) but "a register of new world making" (107) emerges, "making temporality a key character in this process" (106).[5] Third, based on divergent *khwajasara* experiences of temporality and distemporalization as well as a range of decolonial queer, Black and trans/feminist *timely* studies, I ask how time matters differently in the postcolony.[6] Or, more concretely, how do the selfhoods and bodies that matter and churn Pakistan's desires travel through multiple communal, national, and colonially induced formations of time? And what does such interruptive time traveling *do* to their senses of being present as they are?

PRESENTING THE ~~PASTON~~ BEING
"BACK IN THE DAY"

So many *khwajasara* stories of the(ir) past begin with an indeterminate time that is applied as a medicament to heal history's wounds (Freeman 2010, 7), inflicted through generations on their body and soul. "Back in the day, only *khwajasara* knew what it meant to have good manners," Saima told me, sitting among her *khwajasara* disciples (*chele*) in their lower-class household (*dera*) in Lahore. She recounted such time as a proof of respect (*izzat*) that *khwajasara* had enjoyed and as a didactic device, which was supposed to teach her young *chele* the value of good manners. "In Mughal times," she continued, "*khwajasara* used to serve at the imperial courts, to educate people, to give them good manners, to teach them how to be well-behaved." But, Saima sighed, turning to her *chele*: "Unfortunately, nowadays, *khwajasara* are ill mannered. They can barely help themselves, let alone teach the others" (Hamzić 2016, 280; Hamzić 2019, 36). Recalling these Mughal times (*Mughalan da wela*) was not so much about locating societal *izzat* into the precise era of the Mughal Empire (1526–1540, 1555–1857) as it was about recounting a Muslim and Indic spacetime *before* colonialism and the violent dispossession of the historical subject positions (*khwājasarāʾ, hijṛā*) to which Saima and the other *khwajasara*

and *hijre* trace their communal histories. Or, as Bindiya Rana explained to me, "Once the white men came to India," its previous rulers were "forced to take customs of the white men, and to receive all sorts of orders from them." While previously "considered to be closer to God because they were a mixture of both genders," in the colonial period "*khwajasara* were less and less sought after and they eventually had to [abandon Muslim elite service and] go and live among themselves" (Hamzić 2016, 159).

Rather than romanticizing or fixating on an imperial Muslim polity, Saima and Bindiya Rana's stories were specifically told against the tides of the "official" histories that had relegated *khwajasara* and other gender-nonconforming subjectivities into a liminal, transhistorical space. Before the recent spike in *khwājasarāʾ* and *hijṛā* historiographies, which this chapter briefly considers, academic literature on *khwajasara* and *hijre* had variously described them as "hermaphrodite prostitutes," "sex-perverted," "sexo-aesthetic inverts coupled with homosexual habits" or even "abominable aberrations."[7] These studies carried on the same scorn for sexual and gender nonconformity that European writers since the eighteenth century accorded to South Asian *hijṛā* and (at first to a lesser extent to) *khwājasarāʾ* subject positions. And, to be sure, they mirrored the abuse and ridicule that so many *khwajasara* and *hijre* continued to experience in their immediate surroundings. To summon a different communal past meant to preserve a sense of self-dignity and *izzat,* which did not simply conform to the external expectations of *sharafat.* After all, quite a few of Saima's *chele* engaged, among other professions, in sex work as well as kindergarten education (both within the confines of their *dera*), a practice that hardly squared with more mainstream, middle-class notions of respectability. Rather, for Saima and Bindiya Rana, "back in the day" was a time of their own, out of sync (Rao 2020, 27) with (post)colonial time, presenting and futuring an idiosyncratic decolonial register of *izzat* suffused with regenerative and didactic properties.

Besides, as much as their dwelling together—as kinfolk, as coworkers, and as a spiritual community—equipped *khwajasara* with exploratory senses of the subject (Hamzić 2019), it also provided for a plural understanding of the(ir) past. It included, for example, a sense of a *prenatal* temporality. Thus, Kajol told me, "If certain matters in the mother's womb are mixed in a particular way, there comes a girl; with some other mixtures, a boy comes out. And with another special mixture, in which a spirit (*murid*) is involved, *khwajasara* emerges." A *murid*'s intercession may have also made possible what Bindiya Rana explained as the link between a *khwajasara*'s

communal seniority—as a *bare* or *bare-bare guru* to other *khwajasara*—and her longevity. Some of the highly ranked *khwajasara*, she said to me, were "between 105 and 120 years of age" (Hamzić 2016, 281).

An *originatory* temporality was also often invoked, which among Pakistani *khwajasara* was linked to the ancient Indian princess of an uncertain period, called Mainandi. As Kajol recalled:

> It all started in India. It started with Mainandi. Mainandi was born *khwajasara*. A man came up to her and said, "Mainandi, you are so graceful. Can I be like you?" She said, "No! Please ask forgiveness from God! You cannot be *khwajasara*. You are *zenana*." But he went to the field of sugarcanes and he sliced off one sugarcane. He sharpened it and, with it, he emasculated himself. Then he went back to Mainandi and said, "Look, I'm like you now! Am I not *khwajasara?*" But Mainandi was so depressed that she asked God for forgiveness and to open the earth beneath her. So, a crack appeared beneath her feet and swallowed her (160).[8]

This temporality comes forth not only as a link with an Indic past, but also as a long-time marker of difference in *khwajasara* cosmology and communities between those who are said to be born intersex those who are not but undergo ritual emasculation (*nirban*) and those who "imitate *khwajasara*" (*zenana*), even though such subdivisions are sometimes porose and overlapping (Pamment 2019a, 299). And it serves to remind *khwajasara* of the beauty of *nirban,* an initiation into the *khwajasara* lineage and a bodily, spiritual, and temporal re/turn. As Neeli Rana, a Lahore-based *khwajasara* leader, told me, "When a *khwajasara* becomes *nirban*, she sometimes takes Mainandi's name. Because, once you become *nirban*, you also become very beautiful" (Hamzić 2016, 160). The special charisma (*baraka*) that *khwajasara* were widely seen to possess, endowing them with the powers to bless and curse, could also be linked to this originatory event and Mainandi's intercession.

Finally, some Muslim *khwajasara* who had made pilgrimage to Mecca and Medina fondly recalled meeting *aghāwāt* there, whose Arabo-Turkic honorific suggests that they were—just like the historical *khwājasarā'*—designated male at birth but then castrated in their youth, and who, because of their unique *baraka*, served as the guardians of the tomb of Prophet Muḥammad in Medina as well as at the Great Mosque of Mecca, since about the mid-twelfth century (Marmon 1995, 31–112). While such meetings indeed could have taken place in or around these sanctuaries, of even

greater importance is that *khwajasara* pilgrims thought *aghāwāt* "to be
just like themselves" and having a common gender and spiritual destiny,
thereby completing "a trans-historical cycle of gender-variant thereness,
across [the] spaces and times" (Hamzić 2019, 51) of Islamicate societies.[9]
And it is precisely within those societies that *aghāwāt* of yore—some tell-
ingly, of known South Asian origin (Lal 2018, 98)—built their senses of
communal belonging and temporality.

Histories of Islamicate societies account for a complex web of genders
and sexualities, or rather bodily characteristics, acts, and proclivities that
are diversly read—and misread—as identitary patterns, communal prac-
tices, and distinct ways of being-in-the-world. *Aghāwāt* and *khwājasarā*
are but two out of myriad terms of art used in Muslim historical sources
to record the affairs of castrated individuals—clumsily lumped together
and described as "eunuchs" in most European accounts and translations—
whose rise to prominence was often linked to a form of elite servitude.
The popular euphemisms included a reference to bodily difference (such
as *khiṣyān,* "the castrated ones"); types of military or domestic service
(*khuddām*, *ṭawāshiyya*); and most commonly, honorifics (*aghāwāt*, "sirs,
lords") (Hamzić 2019, 36–7). In the Delhi Sultanate (1206–1526), terms
such as *majbūb* were used both "technically," to connote "total" as op-
posed to "partial" penectomy, and as an insult (Jackson 1999, 73). In the
Mughal Empire, particular professions, such as *nāẓir* ("superintendent")
or, indeed, *khwājasarā* ("master of the palace," or more precisely, of the
secluded *zanāna*), came to be equivalent with the subjectivity of castrated
individuals, who often hailed from as far away as Abyssinia (Hamzić 2019,
36, 38; Bano 2009, 418).

Despite their high office, distinct *baraka* and awe (*hayba*) they report-
edly commanded, these castrated individuals formed their own socie-
ties and networks of kinship and patronage—partly, no doubt, in search
for a repose from outward hostilities, which often stemmed from their
perceived bodily and behavioral difference. Examples of such hostilities
abound, including distinct gender and sexual connotations. Thus, the terse
Żiyaʾ al-Din Barani, in his *Tārīkh-i Fīrūzshāhī* (1860–1862 [1357]), regaled
in calling his nemesis Kafur all sorts of names, from "mutilated" (*nāqṣī*)
to "penetrated" (*mābūnī*), referring to Kafur's alleged sexual relationship
with the Delhi Sultanate ruler, ʿAlaʾ al-Din Khalji, as "severed at the front,
torn at the back" (*pīsh barīde*, *pas darīde*) (369, 391; Sarkar 2013, 50). In
a similar manner, the *Mirʾāt-i-Sikandarī* (Sikandar b. Muḥammad 1889
[c.1611]), recounted the abuse the independent sultan of Gujarat hurled

at Ḥujjat-ul-Mulk, his castrated ennobled subject: "O fool, what shall I say to you? If you were a man, I would have reviled you by calling you a coward; if you were a woman, I would have called you unchaste. You are neither man nor woman, but the bad qualities of both are present in you" (126). A few years earlier, envious of the Mughal *khwājasarāʾ* Iʿtimad Khan's many successes, ʿAbd al-Qadir Badaʾuni (1986 [1595]) resorted to a less direct form of critique, quoting in his *Muntakhab al-tawārīkh* an alleged *ḥadīth* against the counsel of women, the rule of boys, and the management of *khwājasarāʾ* (2:63–64). Badaʾuni's gender bias is evident throughout his writings; for instance, in the *Najāt al-rashīd* (1972 [1581]), he warned "that men should refrain from dressing up like women and vice versa" (Majid 2010–2011, 250).

Castrated ennobled imperial servants were often—though not always—accused of "effeminacy," which made them more recluse and possibly closer to other gender-nonconforming palace dwellers, such as "sober and active women"—as they are referred to in the *Āʾīn-i Akbarī* (Abuʾl Fażl 1873 [c.1592–1602], 1:46–7)—who succeeded *khwājasarāʾ* as inner guardians of the Mughal *zanāna*. They were, like them, often of foreign origin and seen as "manly" because of their refusal to veil and for being "highly skilled in the management of the bow and other arms" (Manucci 1907 [c. 1708], 2:332). The term Muslim historical sources often used was "the effeminate" (Arabic: *mukhannath*, Persian: *mukhannaṣ*), which has a long and complex social and theological history and the same Arabic trilateral root *kh-n-th* found in the legal term *khunthā*, denoting an inter-sex person.[10] For example, in the Delhi Sultanate, Minhaj al-Siraj Juzjani (1963–1964 [c.1259–1260]) identified the *mukhannaṣān* in his *Tabaqāt-i Nāṣirī* as one of social ills causing the sultan to become "entirely enslaved by dissipation and debauchery" (1:457). The term evidently did not apply solely to castrated individuals, but it *was* used against them, indicating that the boundaries between the "severed" (*khāṣī*) and "born that way" *aghāwāt*, *khwājasarāʾ* and other gender-nonconforming subjectivities were not always so clear-cut. Indeed, in 1621, Emperor Jahangir (1980 [1627]) recorded in his *Tūzuk-i Jahāngīrī* the arrival of castrated individuals who were gifted to him, noting that "one of these was a *khunṣa*, having both the male organ and the private parts of a woman" (373).[11]

It is, of course, not possible to fully ascertain the effects of the mani-fold forms of institutionalized violence and sexual and gender bias on *khwājasarāʾ* subjectivity formation. The available accounts of *khwājasarāʾ* were chiefly penned by elite men, who were sometimes their enemies or

who envied their beauty, education, wealth, or other perceived privileges. 1
One exception is Bakhtawar Khan, a prominent *khwājasarāʾ* and histo- 2
rian at Emperor Aurangzeb's court, who penned such works as *Āʾīna-ye* 3
bakht, Bayāż, Rīāż al-awlīāʾ and—most famously—the *Mirʾāt al-ʿālam,* 4
completed in 1667–1668. The *Mirʾāt*'s preface recounts how fond the 5
author was of historical studies, always wanting to write one, while the 6
conclusion relates to various poets, including the author. But one cannot 7
assume a deeper sense of the self from this or the other, largely imper- 8
sonal, Bakhtawar Khan's works (1979 [1667–1668]; Elliott 1877, 7:145–65). 9
It is, however, possible, that *some khwājasarāʾ* responded to the demands 10
of an elite sense of propriety by assuming less ambiguous masculine po- 11
sitionalities. Thus, Jessica Hinchy (2018), who studied *khwājasarāʾ* in 12
eighteenth and nineteenth-century Awadh, argues that "*khwāja-sarāʾī* in 13
Awadh displayed aspects of dominant forms of elite masculinity in order 14
to secure the loyalty of followers, suggesting that androgyny was not the 15
only interpretation" (151) of their gender identity, at least as far as Awadh 16
is concerned. 17

As an elite subjectivity, *khwājasarāʾ* still left a much more indelible 18
mark in Muslim historical sources than the *hijṛā* subject position, which 19
chiefly appeared elsewhere and more recently, that is, in the accounts of 20
late-eighteenth-century European travelers, the East India Company's of- 21
ficials and, later, colonial administrators, medical doctors, and ethnologists 22
(Hinchy 2019, 28–30). My purpose here is not to rehearse such encoun- 23
ters, or the language used to describe people who, at first, appeared to 24
the European observer as "human beings called hermaphrodites," wearing 25
"the habit of a female and the turban of a man." The same observer, then, 26
in a manner typical for such accounts, was compelled "to examine some 27
of these people: my visit was short, and the objects disgusting" (Forbes 28
1834, 1:359). Suffice it to say that such early colonial "knowledge" of the 29
lower-class *hijṛā* subject position gradually became the basis for similarly 30
worded local accounts. Thus, a typical description in English, penned 31
by Khan Bahadur Fazalullah Lutfullah Faridi (1899), alleged that *hijṛā* 32
communities "feign themselves women and some of them devote their 33
lives to the practice of sodomy and gain their living by it" (21). This was 34
in sharp contrast with the few remaining earlier non-European sources, 35
such as the eighteenth-century legal documents, issued on behalf of Śahu 36
I, the ruler of the Maratha Empire, which referred respectfully to its *hijṛā* 37
(Marathi: *hijḍā*) community and bestowed on it specific revenues and 38
rights (Preston 1987). 39

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Instead of returning, as it is repeatedly done, to the sites of colonial knowledge-production, I find it potentially more productive to engage with the recent surge in historical *hijṛā* and *khwājasarāʾ* studies, which in a nutshell, challenge present-day *khwajasara* claims of a common ancestry with the historical *khwājasarāʾ*. The argument goes that because the historical *khwājasarāʾ* "presented themselves as masculine, [...] in contrast to femininely dressed" historical *hijṛā* communities (Hinchy 2019, 23), the two "categories should not be conflated" (Hinchy 2013, 8). They performed "distinct social roles in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries" (Hinchy 2014, 278) and, while the *hijṛā* subject position continued its existence—though not without major legal and economic challenges—into the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, *khwājasarāʾ* "did not survive the historical transformations of colonial modernity in South Asia" (Hinchy 2018, 166).

Here, the challenge is to resist the seductive unidirectional meaning-making in the colonial archive and to question *how*—as Anjali Arondekar (2009) states—it "has emerged as *the* register of epistemic arrangements" (2), with a modest hope to propose, instead, "a different kind of archival romance" (1)—one that is cognizant of *any* archive's "fiction effects (the archive as a system of representation) alongside its truth effects (the archive as material with 'real' consequences)" (4). I respond to this challenge by offering but a single insurrectionary vignette that *might* disrupt the logics of the (colonial/archival) extinction of *khwājasarāʾ*.

If, as it is often claimed, the gradual but certain decline in elite patronage forced *khwājasarāʾ* to disappear "into narrow alleys and streets of Delhi" (Lal 1988, 198) and other urban centers, where did they end up? What were their new sources of subsistence? Whom did they befriend and work with? One possible clue lies in Dargah Quli Khan's *Muraqqaʿ-i Dihlī*, a riveting diary of his stay in Delhi from June 1738 to July 1741. Although in noble service, he quickly became an enthusiastic and enterprising chronicler of the city's life, across classes and professions, including its many entertainers. And it is there—among vivid descriptions of sex workers, dancers, mimics, and musicians—that the reader finds Taqi, a castrated individual, who is "a personal favorite of the Padishah and has access to His Majesty's private chambers," but who keeps a "gardenlike home" in the city in which, "like flowers of many colors, young men are always present." Most tellingly, "wherever there is a boy who is unhappy with the male apparel, Taqi's searching eyes spot him," and "wherever Taqi sees a soft and tender boy, the gardens envy such a discovery." Taqi, Dargah Quli Khan concludes,

"is the master and patron of all sorts of catamites because they know that Taqi has carried this art to new heights"; and Taqi is also, "the leader of all the castrated ones, who feel proud to be Taqi's disciples" (Dargah Quli Khan 1993 [1738–1741], 97–98; Dargah Quli Khan 1989 [1738–1741], 155).

Could this be a rare account of a *khwājasarāʾ* settling in a *hijṛā* environment, transgressing the former boundaries of class and profession? Could it signal the way at least some *khwājasarāʾ* gradually merged with the *hijṛā* and other sexually and gender-nonconforming lifeworlds, rather than disappearing into oblivion? Taqi's life story, traversing the spaces and subjectivities of an embattled and impoverished ruling class and those of a buzzing metropole, resonates with Bindiya Rana's claim that, due to the major "social changes, *khwajasara* were less and less sought after and they eventually had to go and live among themselves. Before they used to live in the palaces; now, they were living in their own dwellings" (Hamzić 2016, 159). Such communal re/memorializations, after and in spite of systemic distemporalization, call for what Lisa Lowe (2015) has termed "history hesitant." In historical research, she writes, "hesitation may provide a space, a different temporality, so that we may […] reckon with the connections that could have been but were lost and are thus not yet" (98). Or, sometimes, such connections persist and they *are,* albeit within communal spaces and time-keeping practices that quietly resist hegemonic temporalities and their academic agents.

TRANS ON THE MOVE AND *KHWAJASARA*'S
WORLDING OF TIME

Having briefly come to Lahore for a range of activist meetings, Bindiya Rana was finishing up her lunch. "You know," she told me between bites, "the governments in Pakistan change constantly—today it's one person, tomorrow it's someone else—and we wouldn't want to be part of that environment more than we have to, really" (Hamzić 2016, 167). *Khwajasara*, of course, contested elections, successfully engaged the state legal system and organized protests and even the first Trans Pride March on December 29, 2018 (Hamzić 2019, 47–48), proving extraordinarily savvy in navigating the country's political, social, legal, and religious landscapes. But this sense of an abject, volatile temporality of everyday politics seems to have guarded them from becoming too involved, resorting instead, to what Faris Khan has described as "a form of translucent citizenship—a mode of

belonging which involves not only demands for equal rights from the state but also the right to remain hazy to broader publics" (1–2). The temporal aspect of such "haziness" is important, too. In keeping workable distance from an unhomely time, *khwajasara* continue to *world* (habituate, structure, materialize) a time of their own, a distinct set of timely orientations in politics, social work, and selfhood that, for a moment, might seem to chime well with some other, more hegemonic, systems of time-reckoning, only to quickly retreat to its separate domain.

I focus on a well-known example, "recent" inasmuch as it is proximate to the temporal locus from which the present text is wrought and from which its futural sensing takes place, which might offer a glimpse into *khwajasara* present/future-making. This glimpse is really just that—fleeting, speculative, momentary—pointing to the way a *khwajasara* political activist and *guru,* Neeli Rana, dealt with an external chrononormative demand on her time. It relates to the 2017–2018 #ChangeTheClap campaign, launched by the Pakistani office of a large international advertising agency, BBDO Worldwide, on behalf of the Asia Pacific Transgender Network, a transnational nongovernmental organization. The key element of this social media campaign was a ninety-second video ("We Are APTN 2021a"), produced by Rocketman Films, in which *khwajasara* are urged to change *tali,* their idiosyncratic hollow clap, into the more "respectable," conventional clapping of applause. Other videos were also produced featuring trans and *khwajasara* activists and a trans model—all widely lauded online and endorsed by a range of Pakistani celebrities ("We Are APTN 2021b"; We Are APTN 2021c"; We Are APTN 2021d"; Saad 2021). The campaign's final element was a Meta Messenger application, named Meeno Ji: The World's First Transgender Bot, a virtual "transgender woman and a teacher by profession," who was happy, as far as her coding allowed, to answer "any question you may have about transgender people" (@TheMeenoJi 2021; Pamment 2019b, 141–51; Mokhtar 2020).

It was, of course, only a matter of time before the neoliberal politics of transnational donorship, middle-class national "respectability," and advertising and entertainment industries combined to propose—or rather launch—a remodeled and retemporalized "ideal version" of *khwajasara* subjectivity, subsumed under the larger, hegemonically deployed notion of transgender. In her incisive analysis of the campaign, Claire Pamment (2019b) describes *tali* as a combative, differential performative, "its effects dependent on the spaces and temporalities upon which it is unleashed"

(142), a quintessential *khwajasara* tool of self-signification, contact and
resistance that may disrupt, rather than conform to, quotidian forms of
social hostility and cisheteropatricarchal violence. The campaign robs the
clap of its multiple performative possibilities, turning it instead into an
implicitly stigmatizing gesture. Indeed, in the main video, "street" *khwa-
jasara* protest and curse the (staged) violence that is inflicted on them,
they are pushed around, called names, sneered at, and ejected from a
"respectable" (*sharif*) neighborhood, but they are not allowed to speak.
Instead, Kami Sid, described as "transwoman model," wows her upper-
middle-class audience on a catwalk and turns directly to the camera to ask,
"Never thought people like us could get that far, right?" The idea is that
changing the clap and changing (cis) people's mindset, as Kami Sid explic-
itly suggests, are somehow inextricably connected. Other "respectable"
figures—a "transwoman engineering student," a "transman activist," and a
"transwoman social worker" briefly make appearances but do not speak.
This social worker is none other than Neeli Rana, made up and dressed
to impress, which clearly works because a man in the video gives up his
seat on public transport for her ("We Are APTN 2021a"). As Pamment
(2019b) suggests, the video explicitly confers approval on "these 'deserv-
ing' transgender subjects" at the cost of "street" *khwajasara* "who don't
conform to these images of class respectability or have access to formal
education or jobs in the NGO sector or fashion industry" (146).

Meeno Ji, the Facebook Messenger bot, goes one step further in dis-
temporalizing *khwajasara* and for that matter, the larger formations of
trans in Pakistan too. The same "respectable" figures from the main video
make their appearance once again, introduced as Meeno Ji's friends, but
not only that they cannot speak in their own voices—they are literally
turned into cartoonish, vectorized images. What speaks, instead, when
prompted, is a series of coded scripts, constructed out of the information
available on various trans websites in the United States, which is largely
useless to Pakistani trans or nontrans users of any class. Words such as
"khwajasara," "tali," "the clap" or "hijra" are not part of its repertoire (@The
MeenoJi 2021; Pamment 2019b, 147–48). Neeli Rana's avatar is given a
dignified, kind but serious, look; her black hair flowing down one side of
her face, a golden earing shining on the other side.

For a while now, trans—as an identitary orientational aid, as a register
of both difference and commonality with the re/claimed *khwajasara* or the
formations of queer—is on the move in Pakistan. It has been enshrined

in law in a wide sense, "as per self-perceived gender identity."[12] It inter-sects a variety of activist and communal political explorations and self-designations and it has reached deep into Pakistan's social strata, where its variant transgender is sometimes (mis)used neoconservatively, to divest it from the larger queer Pakistani connotations (Farhat et al. 2020, 31). As Omar Kasmani (2021) has proposed, in an attempt to outline its futural shapes, trans in Pakistan "kicks off a capacious contact zone, triggers en-counters, and generates momentum with implications, which impact but also exceed local conditions" (107). The issue, however, is that some of these discursive and material moves can have serious distemporalizing, depoliticizing, and silencing effects on Pakistani *khwajasara*—and trans, nonbinary, and other gender-nonconforming—communities. In the ex-treme cases of neoliberal futurism, as with Meeno Ji and her friends, such moves can even *entirely displace* trans and *khwajasara* subjectivities with an Americanized bot, where all that is left is an avatar of the former self.

How then, do prominent *khwajasara* activists, such as Neeli Rana, ne-gotiate those demands on their time and subjectivity? Her appearances in the #ChangeTheClap campaign were not only in the main video, where she gracefully takes her seat on public transport, or as a virtual friend of the Meeno Ji bot, the latter commodification being, in fact, done with-out her prior knowledge or participation (Pamment 2019b, 148). She also speaks in a short black-and-white video, stylized as a personal testimony of "Neeli Rana, transwoman social activist" ("We Are APTN 2021d"). And it is in this video—despite its heavy editing and English subtitles, which often take away from the complexities she tries to convey—that her voice and a distinct *khwajasara* temporality break out of the campaign's neo-liberal frame.

"*As-salamu alaikum*," she says, introducing herself as a social activ-ist for "transgender community." But later in the video, she clarifies that she works for a "platform she co-founded," called Khawaja Sira (which she pronounces: *khwajasara*) Society. "It is Pakistan's first organization where each staff member is from the *community*," she says. The English subtitle translates this as "from transgender community." But the use of this English word in *khwajasara*, trans and queer Pakistani contexts has been deliberately more ambiguous.[13] She speaks of violence that she ex-perienced at a wedding party. The context suggests that she was there, with other *khwajasara* to perform *badhai*, their traditional rituals of bless-ing. But fighting erupted, leading to severe violence against *khwajasara*.

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"They beat us all night, some were *raped*. I faced so much *violence* that
I can never forget that night," Neeli Rana continues, her voice firm but
heavy. "When we went to the *police station* in the morning, they started
blaming us for it. They said that we encourage people to have *sex* with us
with all the *makeup* that we put on and the way we dress. That is when I
thought that I will fight for myself. If I fight for myself, then I'm fighting
for my *gender*. I'm fighting for my *community*." The words in italics are
all spoken in English. Neeli Rana's re/memorialization and redress of a
harrowing experience invoke the body's own microtemporality, the act
of speaking out that both comes deep from a *khwajasara* lifeworld and
recenters it, and the language of an activist, imbricating, as it often does,
multiple temporalities and senses of the self.

"People really need to change their attitude," she says. "Clapping (*tali*)
to mock or hurt someone is not acceptable. Even in Islam, our religion, it
is not permitted to hurt someone like that." But the people whom Neeli
Rana invites to reconsider their behavior are *not khwajasara*. It is *those,*
like children and men in the main video, who misappropriate *tali* to abuse
khwajasara. There is no mention that *khwajasara* should change their
clap, attire, makeup, or behavior. But she does finish assuming a commu-
nal "we," ambiguous though as it may be, to provide her own reading of
the context in which the campaign takes place and issue a call for more
cross-sector and seemingly, cross-class understanding and collaboration.
"If we start working with other people, then this *stigma* will be gone," she
says hopefully. "Whatever the profession. Whether it is drama, fashion or
working in a factory or a company, if the *community* steps in, this *phobia,*
this *transphobia* will start to dissipate and will eventually disappear." This
interpretation disorients completely the message of the main video. No
longer are *khwajasara* silent victims or is their *tali*, when used *by* them-
selves, an "invitation to violence." Quite the opposite, it is protesting and
redressing the systemic violence of cisheteropatriarchal men and the po-
lice that animate Neeli Rana's activist life. But there is a stretch, and it is
temporal. It comes with a chrononormative demand on her time to pro-
duce a "legible," widely "usable" account. What she has not said is implied
in editing; what she has said is shortened, interrupted, and temporally
rearranged to produce a desired outcome. That Neeli Rana still manages
to channel a time and complex positionality of her own is a testament to
her activist skills and ability to straddle sometimes starkly incongruent
worldings of time.

PROOF

SHAPESHIFTING TIMES AND POSTCOLONIAL DISTEMPORALIZATION

In his meditation on time and Blackness, Achille Mbembe (2017 [2013])
has argued for an attention to the temporal effects of being and becoming,
with time itself described as "that which one inevitably encounters on the
path to subjectivity" (120), along with multiple and intersecting forms of
domination, which—to endure—inscribe themselves on both the bodies of
their subjects and on the spaces those subjects come to inhabit, "as indelible
traces on the imaginary" (127). Thus, to experience time in the postcolony
"is in part to know no longer where one stands in relation to oneself" (121).
Such radical uncertainty is a fundamental effect of colonial and postcolonial
distemporalization, dispossession, and erasure of certain formations of in-
surrectionary subjectivity, but it has also been turned, in the African novel
and other decolonial temporal devices, into powerful communal dis/re/ori-
entation aids. Or, as Kara Keeling (2019) has asked, "If we were never meant
to survive *as such*, what do we do with 'the time that remains'" (i)? These
are not only invitations to *spend time* differently, in a decolonial otherwise,
but to account for the ways of both losing and gaining a time of one's own.

At the same time, queer and trans each have been hailed as proleptic
devices, with queerness understood as a "mode of desiring that allows us
to see beyond the quagmire" of the postcolonial present (Muñoz 2009, 1),
while "the transgender body has emerged as futurity itself, a kind of he-
roic fulfillment of postmodern promises of gender flexibility" (Halberstam
2005, 18). Against such, all too prescriptive or hopeful ways of presenting
and futuring subjectivity, critical scholarship has called for a renewed at-
tention to the ways sexually and gender-nonconforming subjects inhabit
categories of their own making, which are not inherently unidirectional
("progressive") and can have both decolonizing and recolonizing effects
(Halberstam 2005, 30; Rao 2020, 15). Such unruly inhabitations, in turn,
point to a shapeshifting quality of both queer and trans, which not only
get intersected and coconstituted by a whole host of other categories (race,
class, caste, religion, language, nation, postcolony . . .) (Rao 12), but also
of the contingency of such terms-of-art as "queer time" or "trans time." If
there are no such overarching one-times, if one can only speak of queer-
and transforming temporalities (Cadwallader 2014), it becomes clearer
that one's focus should also shift to the multidirectional ways sexually and
gender-nonconforming people habituate their own temporal diversity. In
postcolonial contexts, such diversity is often materially and discursively

positioned against not one, but multiple, formations of chrononormativity, from the demands of late capitalist "productive subjectivity" to those of a cisheteronormalizing nation-state. And so, the strategies of embracing and preserving temporal nonconformity differ too, resulting in profoundly idiosyncratic worldings of time.

Thus, we have seen how *khwajasara*'s thereness affords a series of time-making practices and orientations: from an indeterminate, "back in the day" past, where they encounter the(ir) *khwājasarāʾ* and *hijṛā* histories; through originatory and devotional temporalities, which connect this gender-nonconforming community with the long arc of Indic and Islamicate subjectivity making; to the spacetimes of "today's Pakistan," where an "ongoing futuring" of *khwajasara* and trans subject positions is performed, exemplified in the ways Neeli Rana moves subversively through diverse—increasingly dispossessive and distemporalizing—demands on her subjectivity and time. I have argued that present-day *khwajasara*'s re/memorialization of the historical *khwājasarāʾ* subject position should be taken seriously, not only as a form of resistance to systemic colonial and postcolonial distemporalization, but also as an act of hesitance, a critical distance, which in historical research can open up to a different temporality from which to think such distemporalization. As for *khwajasara*'s dealings with the demands of both neoconservative and neoliberal futurisms in an era when trans is on the move in Pakistan, I have called for more nuanced understandings of the individual and collective *khwajasara* agency and the art of being present as they are. Those futural dealings may be specific to Pakistan and its political moment in time, but they also reverberate across the subcontinent and beyond, bringing about novel configurations of social life.

NOTES

1   This chapter derives from my long-term fieldwork in Lahore, Punjab, Pakistan in the eventful 2010s, interruptive and multitemporal as they were, which made each visit unique and bristling with its own senses of communal directions, whether within *kwajasara*'s own networks, or the larger sexually diverse and gender nonconforming social and political formations. I am deeply grateful to each of my many interlocutors over/in time, whose names here either correspond to those they went by (always or in certain contexts) or are changed, if I were so requested. Many thanks to our editor Omar Kasmani too, for an entirely joyful and rewarding prepublication process.

2   For the transliteration of classical Arabic and Persian sources and their historical derivatives in this chapter, I used the IJMES (*International Journal of Middle East Studies*) system, but I omitted the usual diacritics in personal names. Diacritics were not used for the transliteration from present-day South Asian languages. For the sake of clarity, I distinguished throughout between the historical *khwājasarāʾ* and *hijṛā* subject positions and the contemporary *khwajasara* and *hijra* communities.

3   There is a growing literature on the making of "respectable" *khwajasara* as a national trope, which is related to but should not be confused with *khwajasara*'s own demand for respect (*izzat*). See, for example, Pamment 2019b, 144; Mokhtar 2020, 5; Khan 2019, 10; Hussain 2019, 335.

4   To use the term M. Jacqui Alexander has theorized in her critical writings about Caribbean state nationalism; see for example, Alexander 1997. Moreover, for the avoidance of doubt, it should be clear that I do not consider every discursive deployment of "transgender," in Pakistan or elsewhere in South Asia, to be hegemonic or temporally and politically damaging.

5   Kasmani focuses on futuring a capacious, asterisked, more-than-identitary trans* in Pakistan; my focus is on futuring *khwajasara*, that is, on specific communal futurities that may or may not travel as far afield as the wider designation of trans or trans* in Pakistan.

6   For a recent study on a variation of this exact question, probing the timeliness of the *queer* postcolony while seeking to provincialize the time of Western modernity, see Rao 2020, 1–32.

7   For a brief survey of the 1950s to 1990s subcontinental literature where these labels come from, see Hamzić 2016, 158, 278, and Hall 1997.

8   For a similar recollection of this originatory narrative, see Abbas and Pir 2016, 163.

9   Marmon (1995) quotes a 1990 interview in the Saudi magazine *al-Yamāma* as, to her knowledge, the latest evidence of the existence of *aghāwāt*. In this piece, an official in charge of the "affairs of *aghāwāt*" reported that fourteen *aghāwāt* "still served at the sanctuary of Mecca and seventeen at the sanctuary in Madina" (111).

10 Or rather a person of an ambiguous or intractable sex, translated as "hermaphrodite" in most European sources. For a discussion on the long history of *mukhannath*, see Hamzić 2016, 94, 97, 278–79.

11 Sarkar (2013, 45) notes that the latter part of the quoted text, in which Jahangir explains how he knows that "one of these was a *khunṣa*," was omitted from a popular English translation of the *Jahāngīrnāma: Tūzuk-i- Jahāngīrī*.

12 §3(2), *Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act*, 2018. This right to self-identify, removing the need for an earlier proposed gender recognition committee, was, of course, hard-won through the concerted efforts of a group of *khwajasara* and trans activists and their feminist allies, which involved, inter alia, an interaction with the Council of Islamic Ideology (Pamment 2019b, 149).

13 I am grateful to Naseeba Umar, a fellow researcher in the field, for a recent discussion on this topic.

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