

## Advance Praise

In a landmark exploration of the sensibilities of an urban majority, Jaffer writes from within the interstices: a reciprocal animation of the social, political, religious constantly blurring yet retaining distinctive composition, and within the institutional modality of Sufi shrines that are less overarching rubric than shapeshifting, time-switching, and contested crystallizations of power-laden public lives always crossing thresholds of inverted intimacy and anonymity, the sacred and secular. Even as it is the locus of multiple interests and struggles, Islam here is less made from scripture or injunction and instead through ordinary transactions among heterogeneities and seemingly mundane everyday gatherings, as shrines act as a platform to concretely imagine a more enchanted and egalitarian city, as this book also enchants us with experiences and concepts many of us have longed for.

**AbdouMaliq Simone**, University of Sheffield

This wonderful book provides a deep insight into the role that Sufi shrines play as public spaces in urban geographies. Questioning dominant Eurocentric visions of the public sphere and building on more than a decade of ethnographic research, Amen Jaffer shows in sensitive detail how shrines constitute a public space where social hierarchies can be suspended or else managed through relationships of obligations between those with varying levels of economic or political power. We understand better how socially marginalized groups construct communities and networks of support incorporating Sufi shrines. Going beyond the truism that shrines are places of refuge for all, Jaffer shows how this requires constant effort and how different communities mobilize to sustain that openness.

**Humeira Iqtidar**, King's College London

In this meticulous and engaging ethnography, Amen Jaffer gives us a vivid account of the everyday sociality that surrounds Sufi shrines in Pakistan. People from all walks of life congregate there for devotion, consumption, music, and social exchange. That does not exclude such impious acts as theft, land grabs, faction fights, entrepreneurship, and state intervention. Of particular interest is Jaffer's attention to marginal figures such as low-status tribals, eunuchs, the disabled, and the mentally ill. A superb monograph.

**Partha Chatterjee**, Columbia University

## The Social Life of Islam

How do Islamic discourses, practices, and symbols become a concrete and meaningful facet of the lives of individuals and communities in the cities of contemporary Pakistan? How do they constitute relationships between neighbors, friends, relatives, strangers, and various urban groups? In other words, how is Islam woven into the social fabric of urban Pakistan? *The Social Life of Islam* addresses these questions through an ethnography of Sufi shrines in Pakistan's second largest metropolitan center, Lahore. It argues that Sufi shrines' position as a vital hub of metropolitan public life is critical to their capacity to serve as a conduit for Islam. Connecting urban studies with the study of religion, this book explores interactions between *pirs*, *murids*, visitors, locals, entrepreneurs, and other actors that constitute Sufi shrines as a key social, political, and religious space for the mediation, contestation, and reproduction of social relations in the city and for producing a distinct embodiment of Islam.

**Amen Jaffer** is a Lahore-based ethnographer interested in the social forms of South Asian cities. He co-edited *State and Subject Formation in South Asia* (2022) and was an SPSS Fellow at the Institute of Advanced Studies, Princeton. His current research examines the embeddedness of infrastructures in neighborhood, market, and household relationships.

## MUSLIM SOUTH ASIA

What is Muslim South Asia? This foundational question guides this series and its goals for creating new and conceptual knowledge connecting people, religion, and region by focusing on the lived experiences of Muslims. Using lived experiences as a conceptual lens opens space for exploring the range and diversity of Muslims across South Asia; critically engaging the nature of experiences and meanings of being constituted as Muslims; interrogating the prevailing notions of Muslim outsidership in South Asia; and engaging a plurality of perspectives and methodologies to make sense of the intersectional relationships that give shape to Muslim South Asia. By focusing on South Asia, the series will highlight the representative experiences of the world's largest Muslim population, benefitting the study of both South Asia and the Muslim world.

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# The Social Life of Islam

## Sufi Shrines in Urban Pakistan

**Amen Jaffer**



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*This book is dedicated to the memory of my dear friend, Muhammad Naeem (d. 2020), also known as Ustad Bareeki. Bit by bit, he collected the promise of Lahore's shrine worlds and folded it into his life. I can only hope that this book can reveal a glimpse of that promise.*

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This book has been more than a decade in the making and as with such undertakings, it has gone through its fair share of twists and turns. Starting as an exploration of subaltern politics, it turned into an inquiry into Sufi Islam in Punjab that sought to conceptually unite the region across the Indo-Pak border. This was the framework for my PhD dissertation for which I conducted one year of dedicated fieldwork in Lahore and other parts of Punjab in 2013. I permanently moved back to Lahore in 2014, finished writing my dissertation here, and defended it in 2016. Immediately afterwards, I started a tenure-track job at the Lahore University of Management Sciences (LUMS) where I am still based. During this time and for several years afterwards, I continued to regularly visit the shrines where I had carried out my PhD fieldwork. In particular, I became part of the social world of the shrine of Bodianwale, which features prominently in this book. Importantly, my status there transformed from being a researcher coming from an American university to study Sufi shrines, to just another person who visits and hangs out at the shrine.

A few months into my new job, I began a new research project on the politics of infrastructure in Lahore's low-income neighborhoods. This was a collaborative project in which I initially partnered with Muhammad Naeem, whom I had befriended during my visits to Bodianwale. We started our research from Naeem's own neighborhood of Chah Pichwara in the Mozang locality and then expanded it to two peripheral neighborhoods on the outskirts of the city. With this project, my research trajectory shifted towards the urban. I fully immersed myself in urban studies – engaging the literature on cities of the Global South, participating in conferences and workshops on urbanism, and conversing with scholars working on different aspects of Pakistani and other cities. I even co-designed and co-taught a course with an urban anthropologist colleague on space and urban politics.

Sometime in 2019, I decided to return to my dissertation material with a view towards revising it for publication as a monograph. However, I felt dissatisfied with the framing of my dissertation, which felt weighed by its reliance on the concept of legitimacy and focus on affect. Perhaps it was inevitable that my drift

towards the urban was going to color my approach to rethinking this material. It certainly made me attentive to the spatial and social location of Sufi shrines in Lahore. *The Social Life of Islam* has thus come to be located at the intersection of the study of religion and the city. It is thus very much a product of my scholarly transitions – not only in terms of my thematic focus but also my geo-academic location.

This book has only come to fruition because of the generosity of a number of individuals who have freely contributed their time, energy, labor, and resources to this project. I owe the biggest debt to Muhammad Naeem, who has taught me much about Sufi shrines and their place in the world. It is my deepest regret that he will never get to see this book but hope that in some small way it acknowledges his immense influence on me. I was fortunate to have a very supportive dissertation committee at the New School, each member of which offered their unique insights into this work. My supervisor, Eiko Ikegami, has shaped this project from its very conception in her inimitable style. She gently directed me towards complicating my argument and constantly pushed me to adopt a creative and generative approach. Andrew Arato taught me the value of an unflinching critical stance that constantly questions one's normative assumptions about the world. Laurent Gayer generously offered his wealth of knowledge and deep understanding of South Asia. Vyjayanthi Rao's careful reading and comments on my dissertation proposal presciently identified several critical issues that I only really grasped in the field. I also want to thank Carlos Forment, Benoit Challand, Jeffrey Goldfarb, Azfar Moin, and Akbar Zaidi for generously engaging with various portions of my dissertation. Melissa Monroe expended a lot of time and energy in going through the first drafts of several chapters and taught me much about writing with her stylistic and editorial interventions.

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