

MELA JALOOS
(Festival Procession)

MUHAMMAD ABDULLAH QURESHI

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES
IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF FINE ARTS

GRADUATE PROGRAM IN FILM
YORK UNIVERSITY
TORONTO, ONTARIO

December 2022

© Muhammad Abdullah Qureshi, 2022

ABSTRACT

Mela Jaloos (Translation: Festival Procession, in Urdu) is a 13-minute art film that embarks upon a speculative queer Muslim journey of celebration, resistance and protest. Taking a performance-based approach, the film uses poetic, hybrid and dramatic means to present a kaleidoscope of influences that are rooted in Sufi histories, queerness, and life in Lahore, Pakistan.

The narrative of the film is centred around a conversation between Mela, Jaloos, and the river Ravi. The three characters come together to discuss and respond to the end of the world, collapsed timelines, and its subsequent impact on the present. Structurally divided in three parts, the film opens a series of vignettes that follow the journey of Rabia, a ceremonial horse, two poetic lovers, and a Zombie Muslim drag queen, who are making their way toward a central holy pillar. What unfolds is a journey and dance of spiritual transgression, opening a cosmos of queer Muslim potentialities and sexuality.

In the domain of Islamic theology, scholars Amina Wadud and Scott Alan Kugle have done important work to re-examine translations and interpretations of Islamic sacred texts and history from gender and sexuality inclusive perspectives. Extending their line of thinking to artistic research and production, the characters, symbolism, and rituals in *Mela Jaloos* draw from alternative and radical non-heteronormative figures in Islamic Sufi histories and legends. South Asian Islamic cultural traditions and my experiences of queerness and spirituality in Lahore inform the film visually. I wrote, directed, and co-produced *Mela Jaloos*. In dialogue with Foucault's *Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias* (1984), this supplementary paper outlines the creative, conceptual, contextual, and production stages of making this thesis project.

DEDICATION

For Mir and Zayyan,

It is your light that guides me toward love and healing.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

John and Mary, it has been an honour and privilege to have you on my supervisory committee. You are amazing. Thank you for your mentorship, generosity, and patience in guiding me through the MFA in Film journey and beyond into academia. I am truly indebted to you for opening the possibility of imagining new worlds.

Manfred and Kuowei, I am incredibly grateful that you extended the opportunity for me to join the program while offering consistent support and kind understanding. The last two years have been hard for everyone. In the face of this, your ability to carry on and provide a stable point of contact is commendable.

My MFA cohort: Chanda, Lokchi, Zac, Eva, Leena, Emmanuel, Laura, Kurt, Jason, Maya, Sandra, Pranay, and Roz. Moving and living in Toronto during the lockdown was challenging on many levels. However, having you as a critical and caring community gave me hope during this time. As we move forward in our lives, I hope we can sustain our connections in the future.

Eshah, you are a brilliant producer, and Saad Yratta, your cinematography is unparalleled. Thank you for trusting my vision and helping me realise it. Jannat, Usman, Hadi, Khadija, Haris, Madhu, Gulshan, Zoya, Raja, Shazaib, and Zain, your collective magic makes *Mela Jaloos*. It has been an absolute pleasure working with you and the entire crew. I truly appreciate that you were not afraid to challenge me and be my sounding board. Saad Sheikh, without your generosity in hosting us at The Colony, none of this would have been possible - *aap ka khaas shukriya*.

Zulfikar and Tamara, you know what you mean to me in this project and beyond. It is difficult for me to imagine my journey without you. When all was dark and unclear, I looked to you as stars for direction. Thank you for being there and sharing your brightness with me.

Mira, I am most obliged to you for trusting my creative and intellectual process, allowing me to digress from my doctoral studies, and enrol on another degree program. Kiitos paljon for putting up with my madness, and I promise to get back to dissertation writing finally.

Merci beaucoup, Elaine. You made the Centre for Feminist Research a second home for me at York. I have cherished collaborations with you and look forward to our future endeavours.

Shoaib Sarfraz and Umbreen Sarfraz, my dearest parents, I don't think I have expressed my gratitude to you enough. Your love and backing propel me to pursue my dreams and ambitions. Everything I am is because of you.

Last but certainly not least, I have relied on your friendship to survive my recent pain and suffering, Bismah, Anushka, Shayaan, Adnan, Natasha, Vedanth, and Danai. In this sense, I owe you my life.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	ii
DEDICATION.....	iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	iv
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	vi
LIST OF IMAGES.....	viii
INTRODUCTION	1
BACKGROUND	4
Mythological Migrations: Imagining Queer Muslim Utopias	4
Filmmaking: After Cruising CharBagh	4
CONTEXTUALISING THE FIELD.....	9
Queer Aesthetics and Intersectionality	9
Queer Activism and Community	10
Queer Mapping: Political and Poetic Sexualities.....	12
Queer Islam: Religion as History, Culture, and Community.....	14
THE FILM	17
Prelude	17
Part 1	19
Part 2.....	20
Part 3	23
THE CREATIVE AND CONCEPTUAL PROCESS.....	25
Rabia’s journey	25
Mela and Jaloos as Counter-sites.....	26
Zulfikar Ali Bhutto’s Faluda Islam.....	29
Directorial and Cinematic Approach	31

PRODUCTION.....	37
Filming in Pakistan	37
Navigating Censorship, Blasphemy, and Violence.....	40
Post-production.....	44
CONCLUSION.....	46
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	49

LIST OF IMAGES

Image 1: Film still from <i>Journey to the CharBagh</i> , 2019.....	5
Image 2: Film still from <i>Cruising: Other Ways of Love</i> , 2020.....	5
Image 3: Anwar Saeed, <i>The Punishment Orders</i> , 1995.....	6
Image 4: Hamra Abbas, <i>Ride 2</i> , 2008.....	7
Image 5: Installation view of <i>Chapter 1: The Nightclub</i> , 2019.....	7
Image 6: A trans person holding a poster with text, at Aurat March 2020.....	10
Image 7: A child holding a poster at Aurat March 2020.....	11
Image 8: Film still from <i>Mela Jaloos</i> , 2022.....	17
Image 9: Still from <i>Mela Jaloos</i> , 2022.....	18
Image 10: Still from <i>Mela Jaloos</i> , 2022.....	20
Image 11: Still from <i>Mela Jaloos</i> , 2022.....	21
Image 12: Still from <i>Mela Jaloos</i> , 2022.....	21
Image 13: Still from <i>Mela Jaloos</i> , 2022.....	21
Image 14: Still from <i>Mela Jaloos</i> , 2022.....	22
Image 15: Still from <i>Mela Jaloos</i> , 2022.....	22
Image 16: Still from <i>Mela Jaloos</i> , 2022.....	23
Image 17: Still from <i>Mela Jaloos</i> , 2022.....	24
Image 18: Still from <i>Mela Jaloos</i> , 2022.....	24
Image 19: Two devotees performing dhamal at Madho Lal Hussain’s shrine.....	27
Image 20: Andy Warhol, <i>Blow Job</i> , 1964.....	32
Image 21: Andrei Tarkovsky, film still from <i>Mirror</i> , 1975.....	32
Images 22 & 23: Sergei Parajanov, film stills from <i>The Color of Pomegranates</i> , 1969.....	33

Images 24 & 25: Derek Jarman, film stills from <i>The Garden</i> , 1990	34
Images 26 & 27: Behind the scenes images of filming of <i>Mela Jaloos</i> , 2022	35
Image 28: Pratibha Parmar, film still from <i>Khush</i> , 1991	36
Image 29: Riyad Vinci Wadia, film still from <i>BOMgAY</i> , 1996.....	36
Images 30 & 31: Examples of Yratta Media wedding photography	38
Images 32 & 33: Examples of Last Shot projects.....	39
Image 34: Mystical Shayari posing in front of the Quaid-e-Azam monument.....	42
Image 35: People watching <i>Mela Jaloos</i> at opening night of <i>Open Encounters</i>	47

INTRODUCTION

We are in the epoch of simultaneity: we are in the epoch of juxtaposition, the epoch of the near and far, of the side-by-side, of the dispersed.

Michael Foucault, *Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias*, 1967

Mela Jaloos is a 13-minute art film that embarks upon a speculative queer Muslim journey of celebration, resistance, and protest. The film combines poetic, hybrid, and drama-based approaches to present a kaleidoscope of influences rooted in Islamic spiritual traditions, Sufi histories, and cultural life in Lahore, Pakistan. In doing so, the project intends to forefront alternative and radical non-heteronormative Muslim figures. I propose an expansive understanding of queerness across time, space, and geographies through that lens.

The literal translation of the Urdu term *mela* is festival; culturally, however, it has a much broader meaning. A defining characteristic of a *mela* is that it is temporary. It can be a happening, a street fair, a carnival, or even a circus. Equally, it can have a holy purpose, involving spiritual song and dance. For example, *Mela Chiraghan* (Festival of Lights) is an annual event in Lahore at the shrine of the 16th-century Sufi saint, Shah Hussain, marking his death anniversary and celebrating the lives of Hussain and his Hindu lover, Madho Lal. *Jaloos* is a procession and refers to a large group of people gathering and moving forward. A vital element of a *jaloos* is that it is not a display of joy or celebration. Instead, when people participate in a *jaloos*, it is a visible and emotionally sombre display. An example is marching or protesting for a social cause, a funeral, or marking historical and religious events. Sufism is an inward and spiritual practice of Islamic mysticism and devotion to Allah (Specia, 2017). Throughout time, Sufi saints have propagated love, peace, tolerance, and harmony in radical protest of the religious

and sectarian divides in religious communities that further us from our humanity and, thus, service to God.

The film's narrative begins with a conversation between Mela, Jaloos, and Ravi. The three characters come together to discuss and respond to the end of the world and its subsequent impact on critical timelines in Islamic Sufi histories. The film has three parts and features Z██████, a horse who fought in the Battle of ████████ in the 7th century, Rab'ia Al-██████, an 8th century female Muslim Sufi Saint and Mystic, Madho Lal and ████████ from the 16th century, and Faulda Islam, a Zombie Muslim drag queen from the future. Enmeshed and confused in time and history, the figures make their way toward a central holy pillar. Ultimately, a story about spiritual transgression opens a cosmos of queer Muslim potentialities, celebration, and sexuality. I use redaction as a conceptual and necessary tool in the film and this paper.

Mela Jaloos premiered at *Open Encounters*, an exhibition curated by Benjamin Merten and Simon Melchers at Artco Gallery, Berlin from 10 March – 23 April 2022. The show was centred around my practice and research, initiating a visual dialogue with other artists, theorists and cultural producers. The presented works included paintings with *Mela Jaloos* playing on a loop during the exhibit.

My artistic practice addresses the intersections of sexuality, race, and social justice from queer, Muslim, and migratory perspectives. My films engage camp aesthetics and performativity to portray scenes, symbols, and non-linear narratives. *Mela Jaloos* is the third and final film in a larger series of works that queer and re-imagine Islamic histories and mythologies. I think about Sufi gatherings and Islamic religious and spiritual rituals as heterotopias, an idea discussed by Michel Foucault (1926 – 1984). Based on this theoretical grounding, my project uses disruption as a catalyst to unsettle chronology, chart intense transformations in the characters, and mirror

worlds within worlds that ultimately transcend into something anew. South Asian Islamic traditions and my experiences of queerness and spirituality in Lahore, Pakistan, inform the film visually. I wrote, directed, and co-produced *Mela Jaloos*. In dialogue with Foucault's *Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias* (1984), this paper outlines the creative, conceptual, contextual, and production stages of making this thesis project.

BACKGROUND

Mythological Migrations: Imagining Queer Muslim Utopias¹

I began my doctoral project, *Mythological Migrations: Imagining Queer Muslim Utopias*, at Aalto University, Espoo, in 2017. The research inquiry responds to the so-called European migrant crisis and addresses an urgent need to recognize queer Muslim voices and rampant Islamophobia in Northern Europe. More specifically, I study Muslim LGBTIQ+ narratives that challenge spaces of exclusion and fetishization, such as nightclubs and gay cruising sites. My dissertation includes two artistic components, *Chapter 1: The Nightclub* (2019) and *Chapter 2: The Darkroom* (2020), and a forthcoming monograph.

Filmmaking: After Cruising CharBagh

I started engaging with filmmaking in 2019. I had no prior knowledge of the field and learnt about the various production stages while filming *Journey to the CharBagh* (2019) and *Cruising: Other Ways of Love* (2020). The films were part of *Chapter 1: The Nightclub* and *Chapter 2: The Darkroom*, respectively; each event opened with the corresponding film and set the stage for other artists and performers – emphasising complex conversations on identity, race, and social justice are never singular but collective.

¹ Doctoral Project, Aalto University, Espoo, 2017 - Present
Supervisor and Advisor: Dr. Mira Kallio-Tavin, University of Georgia, Athens
Advisor: Jeuno Kim, University of Gothenburg, Gothenburg
Supported by Kone Foundation, Helsinki



Image 1: Film still from *Journey to the CharBagh*, 2019

Director and Writer: Abdullah Qureshi, Producer: Danai Anagnostou, and Directors of Photography: Hadi Rehman (Pakistan) and Kerttu Hakkarainen (Finland)
Supported by Kone Foundation, Aalto University, and AVEK



Image 2: Film still from *Cruising: Other Ways of Love*, 2020

Director: Abdullah Qureshi, Co-produced in collaboration with Khadeeja Arham, Zainab Zulfiqar, Umair Sajid, and Hadi Rehman, Post-Production Producer: Danai Anagnostou, and Director of Photography: Hadi Rehman.
Supported by Kone Foundation and Aalto University

Journey to the CharBagh (2019) was conceptualised and produced in Pakistan and Finland. The film is a queer and poetic interpretation of heavenly beings and celestial forms described in Islamic sacred texts. The narrative follows the figure of *Buraq*, a winged equine-like

creature that appeared to Prophet Muhammad. Yasmine Seale writes, “from the Arabic root b-r-q, which means to shine or sparkle, her name evokes the lightning speed with which she carried the Prophet from Mecca to Jerusalem and thereon to heaven, an episode known as the mi'raj, or *ascension*” (Seale, 2016). Historically, visual representations of Buraq exist in Ottoman, Persian, and South Asian traditions. Even today, the creature inspires artists from Muslim cultural backgrounds, such as Anwar Saeed (b. 1955) and Hamra Abbas (b. 1976). The Buraq appears in various paintings by Saeed and Abbas’ sculpture, *Ride 2*. In *Journey to the CharBagh*, the Buraq is revealed in three iterations, immigrating across terrestrial spaces to otherworldly realms. The culmination is a dance of seduction and rebellion between the sun, moon, and a promised virgin.

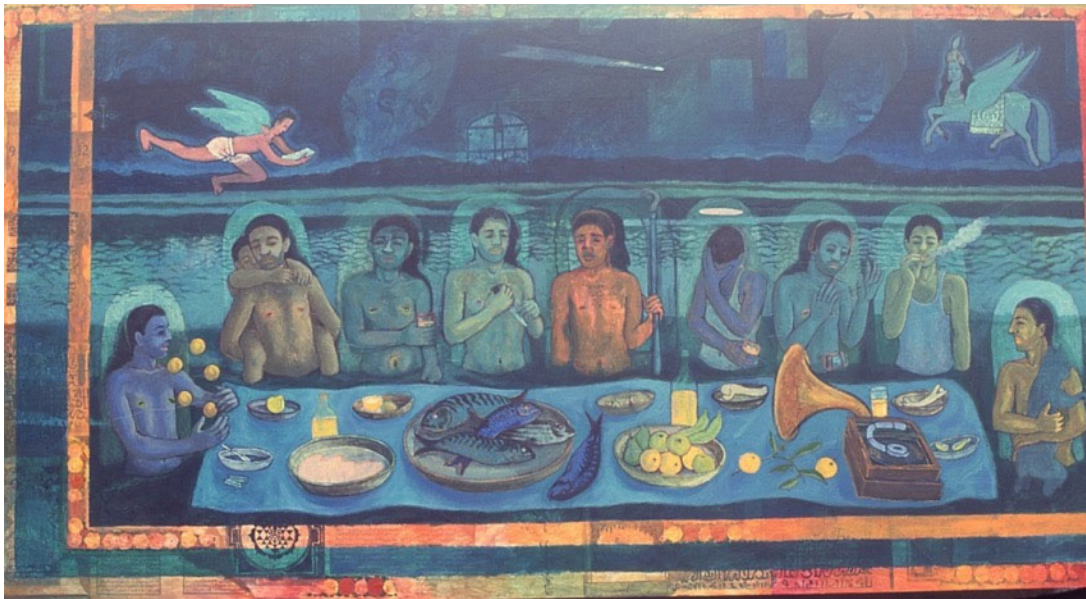


Image 3: Anwar Saeed, *The Punishment Orders*, 1995

Mixed media on plywood, 48 x 96 inches

The artwork was re-titled by the artist as *Every Supper is the Last Supper* by the artist in 2012

Image courtesy the artist



Image 4: Hamra Abbas, *Ride 2*, 2008
Painted fibreglass and wood, 7 approx.. 72 x 39 x 94 inches
Image courtesy the artist

The film premiered in *Chapter 1: The Nightclub*, commissioned by PUBLICS for the *Today Is Our Tomorrow* festival at Club Kaiku, Helsinki, in September 2019. The installation included a two-channel projection on the dance floor of two water bodies meeting, referencing the creation of the universe in the Quran. Once the film ended, other artists and performers immersed themselves in the projected seas, further activating the space and blurring the boundary between the film, the artists and performers, and the audience in the live event.



Image 5: Installation view of *Chapter 1: The Nightclub*, 2019
Project commissioned by PUBLICS for the *Today Is Our Tomorrow* festival, Club Kaiku, Helsinki
Supported by Kone Foundation, Helsinki, Aalto University, Espoo,
and Center for Arts, Design, and Social Research, Boston
Photograph: Aman Azkarizad

In *Cruising: Other Ways of Love* (2020), I take a loose and open-ended approach to the narrative and develop scenes from childhood memories and symbols from Anwar Saeed's paintings. Informed by same-sex desires among men, spirituality, and South Asian and western art and cultural histories, his images portray a dream-like world of wrestlers, angels, and other creatures. Using Saeed's visual vocabulary as a starting point, the film embarks upon a lyrical exploration of queer and brown liberatory sexuality.

The film production took place in Lahore in January 2020. I invited a group of Lahore-based queer collaborators to engage with me in a playful and experimental process to create vignettes. The set design included pre-owned objects, props, and materials. Initially, *Cruising: Other Ways of Love* would have screened as part of *Chapter 2: The Darkroom* in Sauna Vogue, a gay bathhouse in Helsinki. However, I adapted and organised the exhibit remotely due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and public safety guidelines.

In contrast to a live event, the internet has a vast reach, and it is challenging to control participant and audience safety, and several performers voiced unease. Addressing the challenges and anxieties presented by the new virtual nature of the project, I incorporated anonymity as an aesthetic and conceptual framework in the film: cropping, blurring, darkening, muffling, and distorting the images and voices. In addition to the footage from Lahore, *Cruising: Other Ways of Love* includes extracts from an interview I conducted with queer Muslim friends about cruising in Marseille, France, in October 2020.

My MFA in Film thesis extends the aesthetic, symbolic, and poetic language of *Journey to the CharBagh* and *Cruising: Other Ways of Love* and functions as the concluding part of the trilogy.

CONTEXTUALISING THE FIELD

Queer Aesthetics and Intersectionality

In 1992, surveying an overwhelming queer presence at mainstream film festivals, film critic B.

Ruby Rich wrote:

“... breaking with older humanist approaches and the films and tapes that accompanied identity politics, these works are irreverent, energetic, alternately minimalist and excessive. Above all, they’re full of pleasure. They’re here, they’re queer, get used to them” (Rich 2019, 16).

While Rich notes that “the new queer films and videos aren't all the same” (Rich 2019, 16), the review's tone is celebratory and attempts to collectivize the range of films under New Queer Cinema through shared formal tactics. Critiquing Rich's stance, filmmaker Pratibha

Parmer responds:

“I am wary of talking about an overarching queer aesthetic, as my sensibility comes as much from my culture and race as from my queerness. In queer discourses generally there is a worrying tendency to create an essentialist, so-called authentic queer gaze. My personal style is determined by diverse aesthetic influences, from Indian cinema and cultural iconography to pop promos and 70s avant-garde films” (Contreras 2019, 119).

Parmer's statement resists a singular and isolated approach to queer expression and representation. Instead, by framing her critique in her South Asian history and cultural background, she emphasizes the need for intersectionality when discussing queer cultural production. Building upon Parmer's view, my proposal to address queerness and Islam through aesthetics relies on intersectional philosophies, critical debates by queer people of colour artists, and historical traditions of translation, interpretation, and imagination in Islam. Ultimately, this cross-sectional position allows me to look toward Sufism and forefront non-heteronormative

thought from Islamic pasts to expand approaches to queer aesthetics and theory in the west.

Queer Activism and Community

Queer activists and community members in Pakistan have taken an explicit stance to distance themselves from mainstream LGBTIQ+ identity politics in the west, with many rejecting the interest and need for having a Pride parade as a goal (Charania 2016, 42-43). The 2011 US embassy in Pakistan incident demonstrates this: the foreign mission organized a Pride event in Islamabad and issued a statement supporting the LGBTIQ+ community in Pakistan.

Consequently, the far-right reacted by calling the event “cultural terrorism” and violently protested in major cities (BBC News 2011). I was speaking with fellow community members, and most articulated fear because of seeing homophobic posters in their neighbourhood markets for the first time. Activists working in sexual health awareness and access for men who have sex with men (MSM), Khawaja siras, and trans people shared a similar sentiment. According to them, due to the careless actions of the US embassy, the local movement was linked with a western political agenda that was anti-Pakistani and un-Islamic, pushing back the progress they had made by decades.



Image 6: A trans person holding a poster with text, at Aurat March 2020

Text reads: *I am sin... then who is my sinner* in Urdu

Source: Dawn Images



Image 7: A child holding a poster at Aurat March 2020
Source: Dawn Images

Section 377 (Unnatural Offences) of the Pakistan Penal Code of 1860 criminalizes homosexuality in the country. The inherited colonial law states:

“Whoever voluntarily has carnal intercourse against the order of nature with any man, woman or animal shall be punished with imprisonment for life, or with imprisonment of either description which shall not be less than two years nor more than ten years, and shall also be liable to fine.”

In sharp contrast to this, trans rights in Pakistan have seen incredible advancements through the *Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act* in 2018 (Ingber 2018). This new law allows people to choose their gender identity, have it recognized on official government documents, and prohibits discrimination against the trans community (Ingber 2018). In 2018, in the panel *Trans lives are our lives: taking the conversation forward*, organized as part of the *River in an Ocean* exhibition co-curated by Natasha Malik and myself, panellists Sarah Suhail, Ashi Jan, Mehlab Jameel and Sabahat Rizvi discussed the process for this landmark ruling. The legal achievement resulted from decades of grassroots efforts and collaboration between feminist and trans lawyers and activists. Aurat March demonstrates similar solidarity, beginning in 2018 as a national movement to address the political, legal, economic, and social issues impacting women in Pakistan (Zaman 2019). With the goal of "smashing the patriarchy" from the onset, the

organizers' mission has been cross-sectional and included trans and non-binary inclusivity alongside the rights of marginalized communities and people living with disabilities in the country (Dawn Images 2022). Though there is still a long road ahead to address the social stigmas and violence experienced by trans and non-heteronormative communities in Pakistan, the collective modes of activism and collaboration seen in the passing of the *Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act* and Aurat March provide valuable models to think about diverse and inclusive futures in the country.

Queer Mapping: Political and Poetic Sexualities

There is much to learn from the power of aligning feminist, queer, and trans politics that has opened urgent conversations in Pakistan calling for radical social changes and justice. Despite this, in *Queer Theory and Permanent War*, Maya Mikdashi and Jasbir K. Puar point out that the US and other western contexts continue to dominate queer discourses and scholarship (Mikdashi and Puar 2016, 217). According to these authors, “US archives and methods appear to make legible and illegible all other geohistories” (Mikdashi and Puar 2016, 217). Therefore, Mikdashi and Puar ask, “what queer theory may look like when it is not routed through Euro-American histories, sexualities, locations, or bodies” (Mikdashi and Puar, 2016, 217). Furthermore, in an age of overwhelming consumerism and neoliberal societies that thrive on co-optation and turning “ethnicity into spice” (hooks 2015, 366), how can queerness be envisioned beyond sexual acts into the realm of political, historical, racial, and geographical imaginaries? By reading queerness through the lens of diaspora and region, Gayatri Gopinath proposes “a new mapping of space and sexuality.” According to Gopinath:

“this alternative cartography rejects dominant cartographies that either privilege the nation-state or cast into shadow all those spaces, and gender and sexual formations, deemed without value within the map of global capital” (Gopinath 2018, 5)

At the same time, a cartographic expedition to map queerness poses further challenges, for it is a fluid and ever-evolving space, real and abstract at the same time. Articulated in the words of José Esteban Muñoz:

“Queerness is not yet here. Queerness is an ideality. Put another way, we are not yet queer, but we can feel it as the warm illumination of a horizon imbued with potentiality. We have never been queer, yet queerness exists for us as an ideality that can be distilled from the past and used to imagine a future. The future is queerness's domain” (Muñoz 2019, 1)

Rather than the here and now as a place, Muñoz’s articulation of queerness is a call to dream and an ongoing pursuit of looking ahead and asking for more. To Muñoz, “the here and now is a prison house,” and by refusing to accept the present - the world as we know it - queerness is “an insistence on potentiality or concrete possibility for another world” (Muñoz 2019, 1). Continuing this line of thought, Gopinath understands queer diasporas and their aesthetic practices as both spatial and temporal categories. She writes that the queer diaspora is:

“spatial in that it challenges the heteronormative and patrilineal underpinnings of conventional articulations of diaspora and nation, and temporal in that it reorients the traditionally backward glance of conventional articulations of diaspora, often predicated on a desire for a return to lost origins” (Gopinath 2018, 6).

Muñoz and Gopinath disrupt the otherwise queer imperialist positions of the US academy. Their racially informed political and poetic stances invite more open, complex, and diverse contextualization of queerness. Framed another way, their statements can be seen as a critical mirror. Articulating the mirror as a *placeless place*, Foucault states:

“in the mirror, I see myself there where I am not, in an unreal, virtual space that opens up behind the surface; I am over there, there where I am not, a sort of shadow that gives my own visibility to myself, that enables me to see myself there where I am absent: such is the utopia of the mirror” (Foucault and Miskowiec 1986, 4)

In this sense, Muñoz and Gopinath’s statements on queerness challenge and destabilize the absolute illusion of western hegemonic structures, creating the capacity for reflecting the *others*. Foucault contextualizes the mirror as a placeless surface that mimics reality, deceiving the viewer into believing that they are there when what is visible is merely a reflection neither there nor touchable. Drawing a parallel between Foucault’s reading of the mirror and Muñoz’s formulation of queerness, it becomes possible for us to reject queer theory as universal, forefronting other histories of queer multiplicity. It is imperative to state that when examining the intersections of queerness and Islam, the intent is not to impose western notions of gender and sexuality onto a space otherwise read as *elsewhere*. Instead, the point is to rattle the power dynamic and divide between the so-called north and south through an excavation of non-heteronormative traditions that have always been everywhere. Moreover, in doing so, the dominant position western queer theory and aesthetic traditions occupy might be recalibrated to include diverse expressions of queerness that have been there and remain eternal.

Queer Islam: Religion as History, Culture, and Community

Based on historical and contemporary representations in visual culture and mainstream media, the assumption is that queerness and Islam are contradictory ideologies. Debanuj DasGuptaa and Rohit K. Dasgupta illustrate this point by analyzing Ian Iqbal Rashid’s film *A Touch of Pink* (2004). In the film, the two central characters’ “everyday life is shaped through their experiences with transnational migration and racialized regimes that frame queer Muslim subjects as always

backward and outside liberal modernity” (DasGupta and Dasgupta 2018, 33). Such a surface reading would be supported by looking at the status of LGBTQ+ rights in most Muslim-majority contexts (Human Rights Watch, n.d.), where the laws discriminating and criminalizing homosexuality and transgender people are a consequence of colonial residue and extraordinarily conservative and patriarchal interpretations of Islamic theology and history.

Amna Wadud (2006) and Scott Kugle (2009) have done significant work in re-examining Islamic perspectives on gender and sexuality. Both make a central argument regarding the inherent subjectivity of translation and interpretive practices that inform readings of Islamic sacred texts and scriptures. According to Wadud, “no method of Qur’anic exegesis is fully objective” (Wadud 2006, 1). At the same time, I am cautious and critical of framing a queer Muslim conversation from a theological position that cannot challenge its hegemonic structures. In this regard, I have issues with Kugle’s study, which is limited to Islamic scriptures and historical evidence that influence Islamic laws and jurisprudence. He makes a case for the permissibility of *dispositional homosexuality*. He defines *behavioural bisexuality* as sex driven by lack of access to opposite-sex partners or costs associated with marriage, “in which a male may find sexual release with another male while still desiring fulfilment with a female” (Kugle 2013, 45). To Kugle, this kind of bisexual activity sits outside the scope and against the grain of his study (Kugle 2013, 47). He states, “if one takes Islamic theology – and especially the Qur’an – as one’s starting point for making a positive assessment of homosexuality, then this kind of bisexuality is a distraction” (Kugle 2013, 47) I see Kugle’s position as dangerous. Regulating sex and intimate relationships between consenting adults through a system enmeshed with moral and social customs will inevitably result in exclusions and marginalization. While there is historical evidence and a need to interpret Islamic exegesis from a pluralistic point of view, I am resistant

to the inclusion and acceptance of LGBTIQ+ identities that is conditional and subject to contestation based on the views of the reviewing authorities.

Alongside theology, it is also imperative to critically consider political, social, and cultural developments, evidenced by the monumental scale of innovation in Islamic art and architecture prior to colonization. The tradition of artistically interpreting religious and spiritual philosophies and texts is not novel in Islam. For instance, Surah Ar-Rahman, the 55th chapter of the Quran, describes four gardens - *charbagh* - in heaven. Working with the concept, representations of the quadrangle garden layout, often intersected with flowing water channels, are visible across the Persian and Mughal periods. The Taj Mahal in Agra, India, Shalimar Gardens and the Lahore Fort in Lahore, and Naqsh-e Jahan Square in Isfahan, Iran, are prominent examples. Re-considering such Islamic histories creates the potential of de-centring the traditional hierarchy that often places religious jurists' and scholars' rulings on scriptures at the top. Only then does it become possible to explore multiple imaginative strategies for reconciling faith and sexuality.

THE FILM

Prelude

The film begins with black-and-white documentary-style footage of Pakistan's festivals, processions, and rituals: rapidly moving imagery of fairy lights and decorations at mosques and shrines, people dancing, mourning, playing instruments, and marching in various spaces. Then, a horse appears with deep sounds of bells ringing and rippling water, turning into beating drums before transiting into musical chimes and clicks.

Followed by the title and directorial credit, three figures appear in black in a dark space; they are ritualistically circling a sculptural form made of gold and bronze leaf-like fragments. The music conveys a sacred and devotional mood while also furthering anticipation, pointing towards a revelation to come.

The scene cuts to a close-up of light reflecting on a body of water, which carries the text: *a hijr has passed*. *Hijr* translates as an era in Arabic.



Image 8: Film still from *Mela Jaloos*, 2022

Director: Abdullah Qureshi, Co-producers: Abdullah Qureshi and Eshah Shakeel,
and Director of Photography: Saad Ayub, Yratta Media

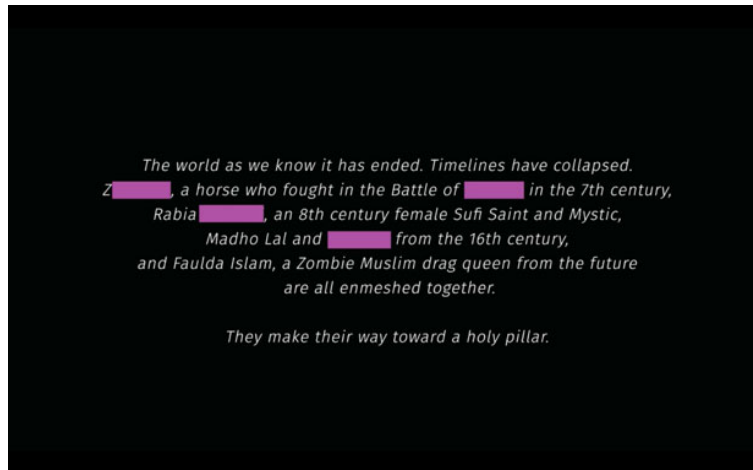


Image 9: Still from *Mela Jaloos*, 2022

Director: Abdullah Qureshi, Co-producers: Abdullah Qureshi and Eshah Shakeel, and Director of Photography: Saad Ayub, Yratta Media

My previous two films, *Journey to the CharBagh* (2019) and *Cruising: Other Ways of Love* (2020), were created for specific events within the larger context of my doctoral project. While both films went on to have their independent showcasing at various contemporary art exhibitions and film festival contexts, they were part of larger installations and conversations. As a result, I had the space to experiment with the traditional expectations of a film while also navigating the cultural sensitivities and complexities of creating queer Muslim work for broad audiences. In contrast, *Mela Jaloos* was envisioned as an independent film and required a more explicit definition of the field, which I found challenging on several fronts. First, I wanted to be respectful of the fact that I was developing a visual language to represent queerness as experienced and encountered in Pakistan from a Muslim point-of-view. Second, I wanted to maintain authenticity through the play of symbols, gestures, and suggestions that do not always translate to the outsider's gaze or language. Finally, I understand that communities in Pakistan, and other similar geographies, are still contesting conversations on terminologies around non-heteronormative gender and sexuality in a globalized setting. Hence, I was concerned that de-

contextualizing and presenting a conversation on queerness elsewhere to the dominant western gaze would result in some loss. The complexity and diversity of LGBTIQ+ communities flattens when stripped of local and cultural nuances; this, in turn, also ignites far-right and fundamentalist reactions in the local space (discussed in detail further below). Navigating these issues, I incorporated redaction as a creative tool, whereby certain words or letters are masked; the overall message remains intact, allowing a way in for those in the know or those on the path to discovery.

Part 1

The scene opens with Mela sitting in a white room, on a white table, sipping tea from a white cup. Her dress is bright yellow, and she wears bangles made from roses and marigold flowers. Shortly after, Jaloos enters. He has a dynamic personality and moves with confidence, passion, and emotion. As Mela and Jaloos start talking, it becomes clear they are meeting after a long time. Though the two sarcastically tease and flirt with each other, Mela eventually reveals the real and serious nature of the meeting, whereby *time has collapsed*.

As Jaloos starts to panic, Ravi glides in. Slender in physique, they are graceful but equally alert and sharp with their words. They wear a glittery blue dress with flowing fabric draped on their right shoulder. Settling their waves, Ravi asks, “what have I missed?” An alarmed Jaloos exclaims, “apparently everything, time has collapsed, Ravi.” Containing the shock, Mela instructs the other two to relax, explaining that all is not lost and that it begins with Rabia.



Image 10: Still from *Mela Jaloos*, 2022

Director: Abdullah Qureshi, Co-producers: Abdullah Qureshi and Eshah Shakeel, and Director of Photography: Saad Ayub, Yratta Media

Part 2

Rabia is praying, and an angelic presence appears to her. Mela, Jaloos, and Ravi reappear; Jaloos states, “Rabia, I know her very well,” and a nonchalant Ravi responds, “oh yeah, I know where this is going.”

Rabia is in a bazaar, and she holds fire in each hand. The people behind her, in black and white, whiz by or gaze at her. A man surrounded by several women appears, dressed in white and gold. They are luxuriously enjoying themselves. Two men appear, ferociously wrestling with each other in a smoky environment. These are representations of heaven and hell, respectively. Rabia unleashes her flames, and heaven burns while tenderness and flowers shower upon the two men in hell. A white horse appears standing on a bed of rose petals. Two men appear. One of them is playing the flute for the other, pausing the instrument, he says: O Friends, I fell for what my eyes saw. Faluda Islam awakens, shocked and enraged - She jumps out of her coffin. The angel dances around the monument, instructing it to vanish. Mela, Jaloos, and Ravi mourn the lost monument in black.



Image 11: Still from *Mela Jaloos*, 2022

Director: Abdullah Qureshi, Co-producers: Abdullah Qureshi and Eshah Shakeel,
and Director of Photography: Saad Ayub, Yratta Media



Image 12: Still from *Mela Jaloos*, 2022

Director: Abdullah Qureshi, Co-producers: Abdullah Qureshi and Eshah Shakeel,
and Director of Photography: Saad Ayub, Yratta Media

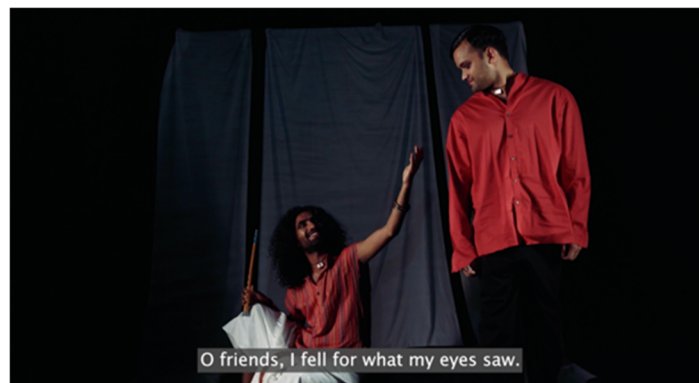


Image 13: Still from *Mela Jaloos*, 2022

Director: Abdullah Qureshi, Co-producers: Abdullah Qureshi and Eshah Shakeel,
and Director of Photography: Saad Ayub, Yratta Media



Image 14: Still from *Mela Jaloos*, 2022
Director: Abdullah Qureshi, Co-producers: Abdullah Qureshi and Eshah Shakeel,
and Director of Photography: Saad Ayub, Yratta Media



Image 15: Still from *Mela Jaloos*, 2022
Director: Abdullah Qureshi, Co-producers: Abdullah Qureshi and Eshah Shakeel,
and Director of Photography: Saad Ayub, Yratta Media

Part 3

Back in the white room, Mela exclaims, "anyway, this is the current situation," and asks the others for a solution. Ravi announces, "I will bring waves," laying their head on the table. Jaloos adds passion and joins Ravi. Completing the chain, Mela proposes radiance.

Rabia, Faluda, and the horse appear on the screen as they struggle to journey to an unknown destination. Faluda passes out. The monument meets Rabia, and the encounter is emotional. The two men by the river rescue Faluda. The horse dances as petals rain, Faluda and the two men go into ecstasy, while Rabia stands tall with the monument. Mela, Jaloos, and Ravi dance around the monument, celebrating.



Image 16: Still from *Mela Jaloos*, 2022

Director: Abdullah Qureshi, Co-producers: Abdullah Qureshi and Eshah Shakeel,
and Director of Photography: Saad Ayub, Yratta Media



Image 17: Still from *Mela Jaloos*, 2022
Director: Abdullah Qureshi, Co-producers: Abdullah Qureshi and Eshah Shakeel,
and Director of Photography: Saad Ayub, Yratta Media



Image 18: Still from *Mela Jaloos*, 2022
Director: Abdullah Qureshi, Co-producers: Abdullah Qureshi and Eshah Shakeel,
and Director of Photography: Saad Ayub, Yratta Media

THE CREATIVE AND CONCEPTUAL PROCESS

Rabia's journey

Sufi philosophies, traditions, and resistance are evident early in Islamic history. For example, Rābi'a al-'Adawiyya al-Qaysiyya, also known as a Rabia Al-Basra, was a female Muslim Sufi saint and mystic from 8th century Iraq. Many legends and miracles are associated with Sufi saints, which, despite little historical foundation, often solidified their closeness to divinity, revealing the high estimation of these individuals amongst their followers (Smith 1928, 53). Similarly to other Sufi figures, Rabia was no different, and many incredible incidents are associated with her. These stories culturally transmit through the region's written and oral traditions. In *Rabi'a Basri, The Mystic: The Life & Work of Rabi'a and Other Women Mystics in Islam*, Margaret Smith (1928) narrates one such incident, where Rabia journeys to Mecca to perform a pilgrimage to the house of Allah (Kaaba). Rabia set out in the desert on a donkey, but midway, the animal died. People from a passing caravan offer her help, but Rabia refuses, invoking her trust in God and not the world that sees women as weak. Finally, alone again, Rabia prays, and the donkey stirs up, allowing her to continue her quest to Mecca.

Speaking to the female saint's elevated status in the eyes of Allah, other accounts of the story state that as Rabia made her way through the desert, "she saw the Kaaba coming to meet her" (Smith 1928, 25). Enraged at the thought of being treated differently from men who made the pilgrimage before her and set on the desire to encounter Allah, Rabia says, "it is the Lord of the house whom I need, what have I to do with the house" (Smith 1928, 25)? Detailing the legend further, Smith writes that parallel to Rabia's journey, "Ibrāhim b. Adham spent fourteen years making his way to the Kaaba because in every place of worship, he offered two prayers (*Rakaats*), and at last when he arrived at the Kaaba, he did not see it" (Smith 1928, 25).

Bewildered, the man says, “alas, what has happened? It may be that some injury has overtaken my eyes” (Smith 1928, 26). Allah responds, “no harm has befallen your eyes, but the Kaaba has gone to meet a woman, who is approaching this place” (Smith 1928, 26). When Rabia arrives along with the Kaaba, she explains the essence of the spiritual quest and divine love over the performance of ritualistic prayer.

Rabia’s stance at a very early point in Islam’s history is remarkable. She took a position that went against the dominant grain of patriarchy and the expectations of women in society. Refusing marriage, she dedicated herself to pursuing religious and spiritual knowledge and service. Working with her story as the starting point in *Mela Jaloos* allowed me to blend historical and imaginary elements, presenting an alternative account of queer Muslim pasts, presents, and futures. Additionally, the very nature of the story, which incorporates fantasy to emphasize the very high status of the Sufi saint, makes a case for engaging imaginative strategies to address queerness in Islam. Unconcerned with what is real and not, whether fact or fiction, the purpose of the account is ultimately to highlight the immense intricacies that reside between a starting and a finishing line.

Mela and Jaloos as Counter-sites

Despite active efforts from conservative and far-right Islamic groups in contemporary Pakistan, devotion to and celebrating Sufi saints continues through shrines, arts and culture, and storytelling. Some of the famous Sufi shrines in Lahore include Data Darbar, Shah Jamal Darga, and the resting place of Madho Lal Hussain. Shah Hussain, a Sufi poet in 16th century Punjab, and Madho Lal, a Hindu boy, fell in love, became companions for life and sealed their commitment for eternity. Similarly to the more well-known story of Rumi and Shams, the

authenticity of Madho Lal and Hussain’s relationship is negated based on the inability to prove sexual contact between them. Based on my discussion above in *Contextualizing the Field*, to only read queerness as sexual would be counter-intuitive and a limiting approach to recognizing the multiplicity of queer expressions that faced systematic purging during colonial times. Today, Madho Lal Hussain are buried together and known as one. The location of their shrine is close to the Ravi River, and their *Urs* or death anniversary is marked annually during *Mela Chiraghan*. In 2022, the 434th *Urs* was celebrated over three days and included spiritual rituals, devotional music, and ecstatic dance (Pakistan Observer 2022).



Image 19: Two devotees performing dhamal at Madho Lal Hussain’s shrine

Photograph by Abid Nawaz
Source: The Express Tribune

From a Foucauldian point-of-view, Sufi cultural organization and gatherings, for example, at the shrines, can be understood as heterotopias. Foucault describes heterotopias as “counter-sites” that likely exist “in every culture, in every civilization, real places—places that do exist and that are formed in the very founding of society” (Foucault and Miskowiec 1986, 3). These counter-sites are situated within real spaces and enact a utopia where “all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and

inverted” (Foucault and Miskowiec 1986, 3). In this sense, by drawing on Sufi histories and traditions as an alternative and pluralistic space within the larger Islamic context, I evoke an internal disruption that also opens the space to destabilize Western readings of *queer* and *Muslim* as mutually exclusive identity frameworks.

As a narrative, *Mela Jaloos* is a speculative pilgrimage toward queer existence and radical forms of gathering, protest, and joy from a Muslim perspective. The epigraph of this paper refers to our age as one of simultaneity, juxtaposition, and dispersion; this is an idea that I employ through creative and editorial tactics in my film. According to Foucault, “the heterotopia is capable of juxtaposing in a single real place several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible” (Foucault and Miskowiec 1986, 6). Reflecting on current times, in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, countries worldwide enforced travel restrictions, strict border controls, and social distancing regulations for most of the previous two years. Initial discussions on various mainstream media platforms articulated forced isolation as an interruption to *normalcy*. It is no surprise that this unprecedented global condition produced collective emotions of confusion and trauma. At the same time, the lockdown became a revelatory space that exposed the linkages between dominant systems of inequity across regions and geographies. The pandemic altered the pace and rhythm of life and, thus, pierced through the illusion created by systems rooted in white supremacy, colonization, patriarchy, and capitalism. The pause brought about by the modification in the usual order of society also became a generative and powerful launch pad for cumulative calls toward social justice. For example, these included: the renewed focus on Black Lives Matter following the murder of George Floyd by a Minneapolis police officer on 25th May 2020; the vast scale of vaccine inequity between the so-called more affluent countries in the West and the rest of the world; the ongoing occupation and ruthless persecution

of Palestinian people by the Israeli state; and the discovery of thousands of unmarked Indigenous child gravesites at former government-owned residential school sites across Canada. Thinking about the radical potential of altering experience of linear time as an arena for politically charged solidarity, in *Mela Jaloos*, I pose the idea of time collapsing, envisioning notions of the festival, protest, and location as characters - Mela, Jaloos, and Ravi.

Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's Faluda Islam

Faluda Islam is a character developed by Zulfikar Ali Bhutto (b. 1990). As the artist's alter-ego, Faluda has lived many lives and appeared in various iterations, locations, and times over the last few years. Faluda, who is "a drag queen turned guerrilla fighter" (Bhutto, n.d.), led a future "revolution that liberated the Muslim world from Western and Western-sponsored tyranny." Now dead-dead, according to Bhutto, she exists "as ghost, zombie, jinn, and alien" (Bhutto, n.d.). Bhutto is also a dear friend, and over the years, we have worked together in several artistic, curatorial, and collaborative capacities. Our exploration into the queer Muslim migratory field began together, and we continue a two-way critical dialogue with each other. After completing the four-film series *ABJD* in 2022, Bhutto saw a natural close to his engagement with the field and Faluda. However, it was pertinent for me to include Bhutto and Faluda in *Mela Jaloos* for several reasons. To begin with, it only made sense to include a queer Muslim warrior drag queen from the future in a story about jumbled time. Furthermore, I felt it was integral to acknowledge the influence and overlaps that Bhutto, and I share creatively. Thus, upon my request, Faluda was resurrected once again.

The inspiration for Faluda's burial site came from the Baradari of Kamran Mirza, a Mughal structure in Lahore. Constructed originally on the river bank, the Baradari sits on an

island on the Ravi due to shifts in the flow of the water and climate; today, it is only accessible by boat. Foucault describes the boat:

“a floating piece of space, a place without a place, that exists by itself, that is closed in on itself and at the same time is given over to the infinity of the sea and that, from port to port, from tack to tack, from brothel to brothel, it goes as far as the colonies in search of the most precious treasures they conceal in their gardens, you will understand why the boat has not only been for our civilization, from the sixteenth century until the present, the great instrument of economic development” (Foucault and Miskowiec 1986, 9).

As a being that existed and eventually died in the future, Faluda arrived in *Mela Jaloos* from an unknown place. As ghost, zombie, jinn, and alien, she exists in realms unidentified and, thus, infinite. Awakened from her death sleep, the only vessel toward land was a boat, which, read through Foucault, is another “place without a place” (Foucault and Miskowiec 1986, 9) that cuts through a body of water that is absolute and without end. While the boat has indeed been an economic and industrial means, it has also been violent, which colonizers used to occupy territories. In contrast, in South Asia, particularly in Punjabi folklore and literary traditions, the boat has been the carrier of lovers from one side of the river to the other. In this setting, it becomes an unbearable ground for separation and longing, which are emotions that reference a yearning for the divine in Sufi expression. Based on this, my depiction of Faluda’s exhausted collapse in the boat, subsequent rescue by poetic lovers and their collective ascension into trance is not only the collision of three individuals but the triangulation of worlds. Though the two poetic lovers are not introduced verbally in the film, one of them refers to a verse by Madho Lal Hussain.

Directorial and Cinematic Approach

My directorial and cinematic approach incorporates strategies influenced by my background in painting, curating, and community. When working with performers and crew, I create a safe and critical space where collective learning and unlearning can occur between the team members and myself.

My visual language is rooted in abstract, gestural, poetic, and hybrid aesthetics. Memories, dreams, and cultural symbols from a conglomerate of South Asian and Islamic references feed into my images and narration-building. During the early part of my artistic training, *Blow Job* (1964) by Andy Warhol and *Mirror* (1975) by Andrei Tarkovsky had a significant impact on me. The two films have little in common on disciplinary levels and form. *Blow Job* (1964) is a 36-minute black-and-white silent piece. The entire work voyeuristically focuses on a man's face, who seems to be receiving oral sex. There is no end or beginning to the piece, and the viewer chooses when and how long they would like to watch it. In contrast, *Mirror* (1975) is a 108-minute drama film that depicts complex scenes loaded with Soviet history and culture and the filmmaker's autobiography. However, what both of the works share is their unconventional structuring of a film. *Mirror* (1975) has a loose and non-linear narrative that moves through images, moments, and events as a dream. Another common aspect of the two films is their play of duration. It demonstrates how using repetitive moving image for extended periods opens a potent space between the visual and the viewer. Elements of this initial exposure continue to reflect in my practice.



Image 20: Andy Warhol, *Blow Job*, 1964
16mm film, 36-minute



Image 21: Andrei Tarkovsky, film still from *Mirror*, 1975
Black and White/Color, 106-minute

Similarly to the first two films in the series, *Journey to the CharBagh* (2019) and *Cruising: Other Ways of Love* (2020), when conceptualizing *Mela Jaloos* and writing the script, I deliberately left various sections of the story and structure open and worked through characters and scenes like a painter, applying strategies of juxtaposing, collaging, and layering. In addition, I am cognizant of the role and meaning of color and form in image-making, which is evident in this project's sets, costumes, make-up, and styling. In this regard, when conducting visual research, I looked at *The Color of Pomegranates* (1969) by Sergei Parajanov and *The Garden* (1990) by Derek Jarman. The former is a biography of an Armenian poet. The latter presents the

filmmaker's processing of LGBT+ experiences at the time, an internal conflict between Christianity and non-heteronormative sexualities, and living with a terminal illness. Though the two works are visually very different, they have formal similarities, as is evident in the non-literal interpretation of the subject matter, altered sense of time, minimal use of dialogue, and focus on the musical score. Furthermore, both directors emphasize the mise-en-scène, placing significant importance on image composition and construction. By using rituals, bodies, movement, ornaments, objects, and location, amongst other elements, Parajanov and Jarman inventively play with meaning-making. Echoing the filmmakers' mastery, with *Mela Jaloos*, I endeavoured to explore a similar ethos to staging the performers.



Images 22 & 23: Sergei Parajanov, film stills from *The Color of Pomegranates*, 1969
Color, 78-minute



Images 24 & 25: Derek Jarman, film stills from *The Garden*, 1990
Color, 92-minute

The monument in *Mela Jaloos* is by artist Amin Gulgee (b. 1965), known for his metallic sculptures and installations. Primarily working in copper and bronze, Islamic architecture, geometry, and spiritual iconography shape his work. My thesis project features *Loss of Face*, a pillar-like sculpture that fuses several masks taken from the artist's face into a single form. The work was selected in conversation with Gulgee and became the starting point for the set design for *Mela Jaloos*. Except for Mela, Jaloos, and Ravi in the white room, the monument appears in all the scenes. The intention was also to include *Loss of Faces* with the horse. However, working with an animal alongside cameras, crew, and equipment while ensuring the artwork's safety proved challenging. Due to limited resources, variation between the scenes relied on lighting, the color of the background, a green screen, and projections. A series of vignettes scaffold the story, which creates a further distinction between the different scenes and aid in following each character's trajectory.



Images 26 & 27: Behind the scenes images of filming of *Mela Jaloos*, 2022
Director: Abdullah Qureshi, Co-producers: Abdullah Qureshi and Eshah Shakeel,
and Director of Photography: Saad Ayub, Yratta Media
Photograph: Hassan Sheikh

Developing the film for an international audience, I was cognizant of the pitfalls of self-orientalising. To resolve this, I sought direction in the works of Pratibha Parmar and the late Riyad Vinci Wadia's films, *Khush* (1991) and *BOMgAY* (1996), respectively. Like the other cinematic influences I have discussed in this paper, Parmar employs dream sequences to convey her tale, and Wadia takes to interpreting poetry. Beyond this, what makes these filmmakers particularly relevant for my project is their gay and queer South Asian backgrounds. Intended as a documentary following LGBTIQ+ South Asian lives and experiences, *Khush* (1991) is

unconventional and hybrid, whereby the interviewees' accounts overlap with sensuous portrayals of Indian dance and sexuality. *BOMgAY* (1996) is a collection of six short fiction films on the poems of R. Raj Rao. Set in Mumbai, India. Wadia's formal take on depicting the stories initially comes across as traditional. However, as the film progresses, the pointed use of factual information on the then-illegal status of homosexuality and the satirical tone to critique social attitudes and dangers faced by the gay community in India quickly becomes radical. Thus, when creating *Mela Jaloos*, thinking about all of these visual influences, from Tarkovsky to Wadia, I wanted to be reflexive of those who came before me while continuing engagement with hybrid cinematic practices.



Image 28: Pratibha Parmar, film still from *Khush*, 1991
Color, 26-minute



Image 29: Riyad Vinci Wadia, film still from *BOMgAY*, 1996
Color, 11-minute

PRODUCTION

Filming in Pakistan

The production for *Mela Jaloos* took place in the Summer of 2021 in Lahore. Choosing the location was based on several reasons involving practical, conceptual, and community-based considerations.

I have a long history of living and working in Lahore, allowing me a deep understanding of the context, cultural and social issues, and access to project-specific networks, community, and resources. In the past, I have worked as an artist, curator, educator, and manager on multiple artistic and social justice projects in Pakistan, including two film productions. As a result, my network of field-specific friends and professional connections in the country is broad and reliable. Unfortunately, due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the rules and regulations were constantly changing, with several last-minute changes and participants falling sick. Furthermore, I had no funding for *Mela Jaloos* apart from small grants available through York University, personal sources (sales of my paintings), and in-kind support.

Based on my previous filmmaking experience, the roles of director of photography and producer are critical to production. Thus, when selecting people for these positions, it was essential for me to ensure that the director of photography and producer shared my artistic and conceptual vision, work ethic, openness to critical reflections and communication. Additionally, I wanted them to feel empowered enough to lead their respective production areas with me. In *Mela Jaloos*, I brought on Saad Ayub (of Yratta Media) as director of photography, and Eshah Shakeel as co-producer.

Yratta Media is a collective of filmmakers primarily focusing on wedding photography and filmmaking. However, under co-founder Ayub's leadership, they have carved out a unique

cinematic approach, aesthetic, and reputation for themselves, pushing the boundaries of traditional Pakistani wedding documentation. Even taking a cursory overview of their social media platforms, a deliberate intention to subvert the stereotypical patriarchal and conservative representations of the bride and groom becomes evident. Their images forefront the behind-the-scenes moments of care-free joy and spontaneity in Pakistani weddings, depict the bride in liberatory situations and disrupt the expected hierarchies in such imagery, where the groom occupies a dominant position, and the bride appears modest and reserved.



Images 30 & 31: Examples of Yratta Media wedding photography
Courtesy: Yratta Media

Eshah Shakeel is an independent filmmaker and film producer based in Lahore. In addition to working on a range of commercial projects, she is the co-founder of Last Shot, which develops short videos, films, and web series to address feminist and social issues in Pakistan. Her recent projects tackle gender-related topics from social, political, and legal perspectives. For example, safety, bullying, consent, and the challenges women experience in the workplace or when seeking a divorce.



Images 32 & 33: Examples of Last Shot projects
Courtesy: Eshah Shakeel and Last Shot

Saad and Eshah brought an extensive network of field-specific connections and experience working with local practitioners. We agreed upon a strategy of casting, putting together the crew, and filming locations, that prioritized members of the feminist and queer communities, or LGBTIQ+ allies, to ensure a safe and inclusive space for all involved. Even though our budget was limited, as a policy, we agreed to pay every production team member (excluding myself) and to rely on in-kind support for the filming locations only.

The casting took place through a closed process, where Eshah and I approached performers we had worked with or knew as members of Lahore's queer and artistic community. The director of photography brought his crew members, and we conducted various open calls on social media for other production-related roles, such as the art director, costume designer, make-up artist, and production coordinator. In order to ensure COVID-19 regulations, we also brought on a health and safety manager.

When selecting the filming location, we had to consider several practical considerations and challenges. The Colony, a multidisciplinary art house and creative hub, is located in a convenient and central location in the city and is equipped with several rooms, an indoor air-conditioned theatrical stage, and other related facilities. Working at this location allowed the production team easy, quick, and cost-effective set-up and access to the venue. Furthermore,

Lahore's temperature at the end of August and early September often ranges between 35-40 degrees Celsius. Consequently, it would be impossible to film during the day outdoors, without the risk of getting a heat stroke, the equipment overheating, and all make-up melting. Being indoors meant we could control the environment more and have full production days.

Navigating Censorship, Blasphemy, and Violence

Filming in Pakistan has its advantages and brings me creative and conceptual fulfilment. However, it can also be a complex space to navigate culturally, particularly when addressing marginalized and politically and religiously sensitive topics. The blasphemy laws in the country are remnants of British colonial rule in India and were expanded during the military dictatorship of General Zia-ul-Haq (1977 - 1988). This archaic aspect of legislation and several other decrees continue to impact women's rights, religious, ethnic, gender, and sexual minorities, descent, and educational and artistic discourses in the country. In contemporary art, three incidents (related to *Sohbat*, an art journal published by the National College of Arts, Lahore, to Nilofer Akmut (b.1956) at Shanakht festival, Karachi and Adeela Suleman (b.1952) at the Karachi Biennale 2019) can illustrate this point. In 2012, an article by Aasim Akhtar published in *Sohbat* that discussed the history of homoerotic art in Pakistan led to protests by extremists and legal charges of obscenity and blasphemy. Due to this, the editorial board dissolved, the research publication shut down and suspended staff (Art & Education 2012). Some artists fled the country, fearing for their lives or prosecution, though many eventually returned. In 2009, Akmut presented a family photograph, replacing the faces with politicians, and positioned the former assassinated prime minister of Pakistan, Benazir Bhutto (1953 - 2007), in Haq's lap (Dawn News 2009). Infuriated supporters of the slain politician violently shut down the festival (Hamdani 2009). A decade

later, Suleman's installation, *The Killing Fields of Karachi*, which responded to the hundreds of alleged extrajudicial killings at the hands of former police superintendent Rao Anwar, was brutally destroyed (Goswami 2019). Even more problematically, the Biennale organizers released a statement disowning the work and criticizing the artist. Despite all these attacks, artists in Pakistan continue to confront and resist oppression, navigate risks, and find inventive methods of addressing pertinent issues.

On the other hand, the situation is more troublesome and violent when looking at more direct and publicly accessible cultural and media engagement forms. For example, in 2015, Sabeen Mahmud (1974 - 2015), founder of The Second Floor (T2F), a prominent cultural and community space in Karachi, hosted a panel discussion addressing the situation in Balochistan (Parshley 2015). The Pakistani province is one of the most underdeveloped regions in the country and has a long history of separatist movements (Hashim 2013). In recent years, the disappearances and deaths, allegedly by the Pakistani state, of Baloch nationalist leaders and activists have increased (Hashim 2013). When Mahmud left the event from T2F, armed men opened fire on her, and she tragically died.

At the time of filming *Mela Jaloos*, two events were a cause for concern. First, in early August, Mystical Shayari, a queer band consisting of Zulfiqar Mannan (known as Zulfi) and Kc Odesser, posted images on their social media that drew national attention and outrage (Daily Pakistan 2021). In the pictures promoting their upcoming music video, the musical duo were flamboyantly posing in front of the Quaid-e-Azam monument, which honours Muhammad Ali Jinnah, the founder of Pakistan, in Islamabad. Upon seeing the photo shoot, Ansar Abbasi, a right-wing commentator and columnist, tweeted, asking Hamza Shafqat, then Deputy Commissioner of the city, to arrest them. Shafqat responded, asking for information on the two.

Based on Abbassi and Shafqat’s large following on Twitter, the pictures of *Mystical Shayari* went viral, and commentary started to come in from all over the country, effectively launching a hate campaign against the band. Though there were voices supporting freedom of expression, most condemned their actions and saw it as an insult to the founding father.



Image 34: Mystical Shayari posing in front of the Quaid-e-Azam monument
Source: The Yale Daily News

Initially, Mystical Shayari released a statement standing by their right to free expression and calling out the defamation, misogynistic, and transphobic attacks they were receiving. However, as they started receiving rape and death threats, they took down the photos and shut down their Instagram account. The two musicians got booked for obscenity. Odesser, an American native and citizen, returned to the US while Mannan went into hiding (Fitzgerald 2021). Months later, Mannan was charged, had to appear in court, and was granted bail (Fitzgerald 2021). The precedent dictates that the case will not go further.

A few days later, Ayesha Ikram, a female TikToker, was assaulted by a mob of hundreds of men at Minar-e-Pakistan, a national monument in Greater Iqbal Park, Lahore. The incident occurred on 14th August, Pakistan’s Independence Day, and though the woman and her team

members had called the police, they were slow to arrive at the scene. The shocking footage immediately went viral through media outlets and started to receive national outrage, condemnation, and calls to justice in support of Ikram. Although officers arrested several culprits, the Ikram case came in the wake of another high-profile incident, where Noor Muqaddam, a 27-year-old woman, was tortured and beheaded in Islamabad. Addressing the epic scale of gender-based violence targeting women and the lack of fear the male perpetrators had of legal or social consequences, many protested, referring to the issue as *femicide* (Kirmani, 2021). Akram is still awaiting justice (Daily Times Pakistan 2022).

Mediating this volatile terrain that can easily and rapidly get out of control, it is impossible to predict and have an action plan for cultural production well in advance. In light of these local developments, directing and co-producing *Mela Jaloos*, I am ultimately responsible and accountable for ensuring the team members' safety. Additionally, I am cognizant that I currently reside outside Pakistan and have the option to escape should the situation get out of hand. However, the performers and crew working with me do not always have this privilege. Furthermore, as was demonstrated in the US embassy Pride event, through my creative and intellectual pursuits, I do not want to fuel or be detrimental to the queer communities that call Pakistan home and have to live with the consequences. Taking these factors into consideration, I am keen to work with other critical voices from within the community in my filmmaking approach. When directing, I communicate my intentions clearly and foster a critical environment that allows the diverse cast and team members to provide feedback prior to, during, and post-production stages. My films are currently not publicly available, circulating primarily in contemporary art and film festival settings, restricting audiences to predominantly culturally-inclined audiences. Beyond the project completion, I maintain contact with the actors and

production teams, and they know that if there is ever a need to take down an exhibited work, that option always exists.

For *Mela Jaloos*, I organized script reads and invited candid feedback on the content. There were some people I was working with for the first time on this project, and it helped that there were collaborators from previous productions, as they were independently able to discuss their experiences. In addition to selecting a private and indoor location for production, Shakeel and I conducted multiple meetings with each performer and crew member, explaining our stance on their safety and harassment on set. We discussed that if they encountered problems, they could directly come to either of us, where we would take the appropriate action to resolve or deal with the matter as a priority. Moreover, finally, upon completion of post-production, I shared a private link with the performers and crew, seeking their go-ahead before the premiere.

Post-production

The post-production team included Tamara [REDACTED]-[REDACTED] as the video editor and colourist and Zain Awan as the music composer and sound editor. [REDACTED]-[REDACTED] is a London-based [REDACTED]-[REDACTED] artist and organizer, and Awan is a Pakistani-Australian singer, songwriter, and producer. My relationship with them has developed over several projects, including *Journey to the CharBagh* (2019) and *Cruising: Other Ways of Love* (2020). Thus, when approaching *Mela Jaloos*, there was comfort and ease. Upon completing this final project in the film series, I invited [REDACTED]-[REDACTED] (T[REDACTED]) and Awan (ZA) to discuss our editorial and collaborative process. The conversation took place virtually on 19th July 2022; this paper includes the following edited extracts.

T: When I think about our relationship and journey, I don't just think about our recent editorial work, because you and I have had a background of getting to know each other, collaborating on art, but also organizing, producing, and curating projects. In some ways, I don't see the editing work as a collaboration because it is very much your work, and I am providing my skills as a video artist. At the same time, given our history, I know YOU and deeply understand your practice. So as you were starting to engage with film as a new artistic medium, I was excited and felt we were going somewhere new together. Moreover, the process resulted in lots of important questions for me. Our identities are hyper-politicized - what does it mean to be [REDACTED], [REDACTED], [REDACTED], and so on - how does one make art responding to the relentless onslaught of violence?

ZA: When you approached me for *Journey to the Charbagh*, I was trying to be an independent singer-songwriter and was managed by this guy. I was kind of up against a wall trying to condense childhood influences from Pakistan - 90s Bollywood, R&B, Pop, Nazia Hassan, all the things I love - and then sanitize them for a white man, a white music label. Looking back now, I was fighting for autonomy in my creative process and trying to decolonize my sound. My involvement in *Journey to the CharBagh* was limited, where I contributed to two tracks. However, I loved working on *Cruising: Other Ways of Love* and then *Mela Jaloos*, where I was more fully developing the sound and compositions in response to what you had created and working toward harmony. Out of the three films, *Mela Jaloos* is probably the most eccentric. When I listen to it, I can hear so many moments and recognize melodies, and overall, it was just a very expressive journey. During the pandemic, I was in Melbourne and spending so much time in the quiet. I developed a more ecological focus and started to notice the stillness within that. I subconsciously feel this fed into the oral soundscape of the film.

T: Since we have known each other for a while, there wasn't a fear of critical and direct conversations. Moreover, while you said what you wanted, I also had a lot of freedom and room to interpret ideas. I think what I am trying to get at is that there is mutual trust. So, trust is a big part of collaboration because you have to listen and give each other space.

ZA: Collaborating in the context of these three works has been about the process. Shapeshifting, mapping myself and the trajectory I was on, because I was creatively, mentally, and spiritually in very different places each time. At the time of *Journey to the CharBagh*, my understanding of a collaborative process was way more traditional - like doing a writing session or working together in the studio, basically the conventional ways musicians may collaborate. However, the more we worked together, the more it pushed me to think of collaboration as not linear and literal. I felt challenged to take a more out-of-the-box approach to sound and sound editing. So similarly to Tamara, trust is a significant element in collaboration, but also to create an empowering space that allows us to make choices we have not made before.

CONCLUSION

Mela Jaloos commences with a dialogue between Mela, Jaloos, and Ravi, evaluating the catastrophic implications of entangled time. The short film is organized into three parts and engages artistic and hybrid storytelling. The disturbance is felt across dimensions, moving Rabia, two poetic lovers, a battle horse on earth, a Muslim drag queen from a dominion beyond death, and beings and fighters in heaven and hell toward a collision path. Finally, the characters grapple with the chaos, drawn to a monument, which they love, worship, and celebrate.

My premise is anchored in intersectional theory, particularly the work of Muñoz and Gopinath; they think about queerness as a critical site of radical potential that transcends the here and now and is inherently capable of destabilizing dominant heteronormative constructions of race and society, respectively. Based on this grounding, *Mela Jaloos* frames Islamic Sufi spiritual philosophies and traditions through Foucault's notion of heterotopias, which are also disruptive sites that exist within larger systems, mimicking reality, but in conjunction, are defiant and disobedient. My aesthetic and formal approaches are rooted in South Asian cultural, collaborative, and community practice.

I attended the premiere of *Mela Jaloos* in Berlin, and the public responses to the film were generally positive and encouraging. However, when conversing with the attendees, some asked me questions such as if I ever went back to Pakistan or when I was last there. Without thinking much about the curious inquiries, I enthusiastically told them that I visit often and that the production of all my current films took place there.



Image 35: People watching *Mela Jaloos* at opening night of *Open Encounters*
Curated by Benjamin Merten and Simon Melchers
Thx Again and ARTCO Gallery, Berlin, March 2020
Photograph: Raisa M. Galofre Cortés

Reflecting now, I realize that the statement about my ongoing connection with Pakistan surprised the audience. Perhaps they assumed my open ability to embody, engage, and represent the queer Muslim experience was only possible outside my country of origin. The fantasies that the west has perpetuated through colonial histories and contemporary media position itself as enlightened and free, and all other spaces held hostage in primitive eras, with their people in need of liberation. Mikdashi and Puar examine this point through queer theory, asking what shape such discourses may take when centring Black, Indigenous, People of Color, and non-western perspectives. Reading Mikdashi and Puar as a call to action, my thesis project plunges deep into the world of queer Muslim imaginaries.

While confronting Islamophobia and complicating queerness from a racialized and migratory lens, there is a looming shadow and fear of reactions from far-right and fundamentalist

factions in Pakistan. These groups distort patriarchal attitudes and the most conservative facets of faith to reap hate and violence against difference. There is evidence of interpreting religious and spiritual ideas in Islamic art and architecture before colonization. Thus, my project incorporates historical and speculative elements, emphasizing community in production. In doing so, I wish to highlight the pluralism of the spectrum, not just in the now but always. Queer Muslims, like all LGBTIQ+ racialized and migratory bodies, experience othering and exclusions on multiple levels. To Muñoz, “the here and now is a prison house.” Consequently, in this thesis discussion, the here and now also deny home in that confinement. Nevertheless, queerness must assert and always strive for belonging that is not fractional but continuously all-encompassing. Therefore, rather than a definitive examination of queerness and Islam, I hope *Mela Jaloos* is a beginning and invitation to expand diverse conversations and communities.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Art & Education. 2012. "Editorial Board of Pakistan's National College of Arts Dissolved over Charges of Blasphemy." *News - Art & Education*. July 2. <https://www.artandeducation.net/news/56164/editorial-board-of-pakistans-national-college-of-arts-dissolved-over-charges-of-blasphemy>.
- BBC News. 2011. "Pakistan: Religious Groups Condemn US Embassy Gay Event." *BBC News*, July 4. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-south-asia-14010106>.
- Bhutto, Zulfikar Ali. n.d. "Alif Is for Awakening." *Zulfikar Ali Bhutto*. Accessed November 13, 2022. <https://www.zulfikaralibhuttoart.org/the-alif-series>.
- Bhutto, Zulfikar Ali. n.d. "In the Name of the Zombie (Workshop)20." *Zulfikar Ali Bhutto*. Accessed November 13, 2022. <https://www.zulfikaralibhuttoart.org/in-the-name-of-the-zombie-workshop>.
- Charania, Moon. 2016. "Outing the Pakistani Queer: Pride, Paranoia and Politics in US Visual Culture." *Sexualities* 20 (1-2): 41–64. doi:10.1177/1363460716633393.
- Contreras, Daniel T. 2019. "New Queer Cinema: Spectacle, Race, Utopia." Essay. In *New Queer Cinema: A Critical Reader*, edited by Michele Aaron, 119–27. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Daily Pakistan. 2021. "Mystical Shayari' Duo Booked for 'Obscene' Photoshoot in Front of Quaid's Statue in Islamabad." *Daily Pakistan*, August 4. <https://en.dailypakistan.com.pk/04-Aug-2021/mystical-shayari-duo-booked-for-obscene-photoshoot-in-front-of-quaid-s-statue-in-islamabad>.
- Daily Times Pakistan. 2022. "Still Waiting for Justice in Harassment Case, Says TikToker Ayesha Akram." *Daily Times Pakistan*, August 13. <https://dailytimes.com.pk/981311/still-waiting-for-justice-in-harassment-case-says-tiktoker-ayesha-akram/>.
- DasGupta, Debanuj, and Rohit K. Dasgupta. 2018. "Being out of Place: Non-Belonging and Queer Racialization in the U.K." *Emotion, Space and Society* 27: 31–38. doi:10.1016/j.emospa.2018.02.008.
- Dawn. 2009. "Censoring the Image." *Dawn*, May 17. <https://www.dawn.com/news/858991/censoring-the-image>.
- Dawn. 2019. "Aurat March to Highlight 'Sisterhood and Solidarity.'" *Dawn*, March 7. <https://www.dawn.com/news/1468109>.
- Dawn Images, ed. 2020. "These Posters from Aurat March Spoke Our Hearts Out." *Dawn Images*, September 19. <https://images.dawn.com/news/1184806>.

- Dawn Images. 2022. "I Went to the Aurat March for the Very First Time and Here's What I Saw." *Dawn Images*, March 9. <https://images.dawn.com/news/1189677>.
- Fahy-Majeed, Adam. 2022. "Amin Gulgee's 'The Spider Speaketh in Tongues' – A Curator's Note." *The Friday Times*, April 17. <https://www.thefridaytimes.com/2022/04/17/amin-gulgees-the-spider-speaketh-in-tongues-a-curators-note/>.
- Fitzgerald, Jordan. 2021. "Pakistani Courts Confirm Bail for Yale Alum after LGBTQ-Inspired Photoshoot." *Yale News*. October 8. <https://yaledailynews.com/blog/2021/10/08/pakistani-courts-confirm-bail-for-yale-alum-after-lgbtq-inspired-photoshoot/>.
- Foucault, Michel, and Jay Miskowiec. 1986. "Of Other Spaces." *Diacritics* 16 (1): 22. doi:10.2307/464648.
- Gopinath, Gayatri. 2018. "Introduction. Archive, Region, Affect, Aesthetics." Essay. In *Unruly Visions: The Aesthetic Practices of Queer Diaspora*, 1–18. Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press.
- Goswami, Devneel. 2019. "Installation by Artist Adeela Suleman Destroyed at Karachi Biennale." *The Wire*, November 7. <https://thewire.in/south-asia/karachi-biennale-adeela-suleman>.
- Hamdani, Yasser Latif. 2009. "The Shanaakht Fiasco." *Pak Tea House*. April 11. <https://pakteahouse.wordpress.com/2009/04/11/the-shanaakht-fiasco/>.
- Hashim, Asad. 2013. "Pakistan's Unending Battle over Balochistan." *Aljazeera*, April 16. <https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2013/4/16/pakistans-unending-battle-over-balochistan>.
- hooks, bell. 2015. "Eating the Other: Desire and Resistance." Essay. In *Black Looks: Race and Representation*, 366–80. New York, New York: Routledge.
- Human Rights Watch. 2022. "#OUTLAWED: 'The Love That Dare Not Speak Its Name.'" *Maps of Anti-LGBT Laws Country by Country | Human Rights Watch*. http://internap.hrw.org/features/features/lgbt_laws/.
- Ingber, Sasha. 2018. "Pakistan Passes Historic Transgender Rights Bill." *NPR*, May 9. <https://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2018/05/09/609700652/pakistan-passes-historic-transgender-rights-bill>.
- Jarman, Derek, dir. 1990. *The Garden. Mubi*. Basilisk Communications, in association with Channel 4, British Screen, and ZDF. <https://mubi.com/films/the-garden-1990>.
- Kirmani, Nida. 2021. "The Past Few Months Have Been Harrowing for Pakistani Women." *Aljazeera*, October 8. <https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2021/10/8/violence-against-women-in-pakistan-is-not-new-but-it-must-stop>.

- Kugle, Scott Alan. 2013. *Homosexuality in Islam: Critical Reflection on Gay, Lesbian and Transgender Muslims*. Oxford, UK: Oneworld.
- Mikdashī, Maya, and Jasbir K. Puar. 2016. "Queer Theory and Permanent War." *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 22 (2): 215–22. doi:10.1215/10642684-3428747.
- Muñoz José Esteban. 2019. "Introduction: Feeling Utopia." Essay. In *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*, 1–18. New York, New York: New York University Press.
- Nawaz, Abid. 2015. "Madhu Lal Urs: Dhamal, Langar Food Mark Beginning of Mela Chiraghan." *The Express Tribune*, March 28. <https://tribune.com.pk/story/860679/madhu-lal-urs-dhamal-langar-food-mark-beginning-of-mela-chiraghan>.
- Pakistan Observer. 2022. "Mela Chiraghan in Full Swing." *Pakistan Observer*, March 28. <https://pakobserver.net/mela-chiraghan-in-full-swing/>.
- Parmar, Pratibha, dir. 1991. *Khush*. *Pratibha Parmar*. Kali Productions. <https://pratibhaparmar.com/khush/>.
- Parshley, Lois. 2015. "The Life and Death of Sabeen Mahmud." *Newyorker*, April 28. <https://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/the-life-and-death-of-sabeen-mahmud>.
- Seale, Yasmine. 2016. "Out of Their Love They Made It: A Visual History of Buraq." *The Public Domain Review*. The Public Domain Review. September 21. <https://publicdomainreview.org/essay/out-of-their-love-they-made-it-a-visual-history-of-buraq>.
- Shakhbazian, Suren, and Tigran Mansuryan. 1972. *The Color of Pomegranates*. Directed by Paradzhanov Sergeĭ. *The Criterion Collection*. U.S.S.R.: Armenfilm. <https://www.criterion.com/films/29219-the-color-of-pomegranates>.
- Smith, Margaret. 1928. *Rābi‘a The Mystic & Her Fellow-Saints in islām: Being the Life and Teachings of rābi‘a Al-‘adawiyya Al-Qaysiyya of Basra Together with the Place of the Women Saints in Islām*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Specia, Megan. 2017. "Who Are Sufi Muslims and Why Do Some Extremists Hate Them?" *The New York Times*. The New York Times. November 24. <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/11/24/world/middleeast/sufi-muslim-explainer.html>.
- Suhail, Saraf, Ashi Jan, and Sabahat Rizvi. 2018. "Trans Lives Are Our Lives: Taking the Conversation Forward." *River in an Ocean: a Collateral Event of Lahore Biennale 01*. Lecture presented at the River in an ocean: a collateral event of Lahore Biennale 01, March 31.
- Tarkovsky, Andrei, dir. 1975. *Mirror*. *The Criterion Collection*. Principal photography, Mosfilm studio. <https://www.criterion.com/films/28894-mirror>.

Unnatural Offences. 1860. Vol. Pakistan Penal Code.

Wadia, Riyad Vinci, dir. 1996. *BOMgAY. Barbican*. Wadia Movietone.
<https://www.barbican.org.uk/whats-on/2022/event/liff-bomgay-the-pionering-shorts-of-riyad-vinci-wadia>.

Wadud, Amina. 2006. *Qur'an and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Warhol, Andy, dir. 1964. *Blow Job. MoMA*. The Factory.
<https://www.moma.org/collection/works/142425>.

Zaman, Haseem uz. 2019. "Aurat March 2020: Women, Trans People, Non-Binary Folks Rallying Stronger than Ever!" *GEO News*, November 28.
<https://www.geo.tv/latest/258919-women-transgender-people-non-binary-folks-rallying-stronger-than-ever-for-aurat-march-2020>.