DHIKR
The Contemplative Life in the Sufi Tradition

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Abstract: *In recent years, modern rationalists and religious extremists have attacked Islam's esoteric Sufism, dismissing it as irrational or heretical. While Salafi groups aim to impose a strict legalism on Islam's inner dimensions, the influence of modernity has also led many to abandon a cosmological view of existence. Amid a turbulent environment, Sufis persist in fostering an "anthropocosmic" self-image through intense contemplative practices like* dhikr. *Commonly referred to as the "remembrance" of God, dhikr is performed in various ways, involving the invocation of God's name as a technique of disclosing a God-like ethos in one's being. I argue that Sufis employ contemplation as a means to fuse the cosmic and the material into a singular experience of being.*

In a cramped currency exchange office on Karachi's bustling Tariq Road in Pakistan, where the rhythms of global finance meet ancient spiritual practices, a trader named Amir pauses between transactions to contemplate the Quranic verse "Then do ye remember Me; I will remember you" (Quran 2:152).[1] His interpretation—"You remember yourself [*apnā āp*], and the self will remember you in return"[2]—reveals how traditional Sufi concepts of selfhood persist within modern economic life. For Amir and other traders, this remembrance is not merely metaphorical but is ritualized through *dhikr*, or "remembrance," a contemplative technique that is intended to negate the historically shaped self while striving toward the eternal. Amir sketches a chart on paper one afternoon between transactions to illustrate this spiritual ascension. The diagram, which I originally thought came from an ancient Sufi text, illustrates spiritual hierarchy—what ancient philosophers termed the "Great Chain of Being" (*scala naturae*). It depicts a hierarchical cosmos: minerals, plants, animals, humans, angels, the celestial sphere, and ultimately, God (*Allāh*)—all interconnected in a remarkable concept of an "anthropocosmic self." This concept fuses material and spiritual dimensions into a singular experience of selfhood that exceeds the modern notions of personhood. "We humans are at the level of minerals, symbolizing a dormant nature," Amir explains, his hands moving across the diagram. "Dhikr helps us to ascend from this passive condition to the highest level of Divinity." Surprised by his deep knowledge of this traditional spiritual framework, I asked, "Who taught you this view of existence?" He replied, "My spiritual master (*murshid*), and he also showed me the dhikr as a way of inward ascension."[3]

This article examines ethnographic research on Muslim selfhood to elucidate the daily practice of dhikr among Sufis. Commonly perceived as a way to remember God, "dhikr" entails reciting and invoking God's name, highlighting a divine essence in everyday life. The article posits that

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dhikr, as observed in contemporary Sufi communities in Pakistan, acts as a crucial connection between the cosmic and human aspects of existence through embodied contemplative practices. Despite opposition from Islamic fundamentalists who denounce Sufi traditions as heretical and from modern rationalists who view them as outdated, dhikr persists. It offers practitioners a way to integrate material and spiritual existence into what Sufis call the "perfect human" (*al-insān al-kāmil*), a way of being that goes beyond the typical separation of material and spiritual realms, or the anthropocosmic self. Through ethnographic observation and engagement with practices like breath control, sense deprivation, and the master-disciple relationship, this article explores the Sufi contemplative exercise of dhikr as a technique for synthesizing the spiritual and material in a unique conceptualization of the anthropocosmic self.

The article consists of four interconnected sections. It begins by investigating the semantic and embodied aspects of dhikr and how physical contemplation shapes consciousness. I argue that during dhikr, the negating and affirming declaration—"no god but God"—a core Islamic tenet known as *Tawḥīd*, or divine unity, facilitates a fusion of human and divine experiences within the context of the anthropocosmic self. This section then demonstrates the sacred practice of breathing, illustrating how this biological function transforms into a spiritual exercise that fosters self-formation. Next, it examines Amir's representation of the Great Chain of Being, revealing how the anthropocosmic self mirrors God's unity. The following section situates contemplation and the Sufi tradition within a dynamic of power, underscoring the current challenges that affect the inner dimensions of Islam. It contextualizes dhikr within a social framework, shifting the practice of contemplation from a personal endeavor to a ritual under contention that faces modern pressures. Finally, the concluding section explores Sufi lineages as a "contemplative chain," showing how contemplative practices are transmitted from spiritual masters to their disciples. This section emphasizes how oral and experiential learning preserves esoteric knowledge beyond formal educational settings. While grounded in Sufi Islam, the dhikr practice allows for a profound self-conceptualization through the perspective of the anthropocosmic self, transcending conventional ideas of modern identity.

The research employs participant observation, involving a decade-long engagement with interlocutors and active engagement in both ritual and contemplative contexts, through which I moved beyond detached observation by fully engaging in my interlocutors' lives, thereby gaining insights that conventional methods cannot achieve. Living and teaching as a full-time faculty member in Karachi since 2014 afforded intimate access to my interlocutors' lifeworlds, an immersion rarely available through the extractive styles of fieldwork often conducted from abroad. This participatory methodology provides notable benefits compared to traditional scholarly methods related to the study of Muslim spiritual lives. Instead of depending on interviews or structured observation, I adopted the role of an experiential ethnographer, allowing my grasp of anthropological concepts to develop through practical engagement rather than theoretical assumptions. My decade-long involvement in Thursday night contemplative rituals exemplifies experiential knowledge, and the dhikr practices in which I engaged with deep commitment exposed my own subjectivity to the same transformative spiritual techniques that shape my interlocutors' inner worlds—akin to Alan Klima's engagement with Buddhist rituals in Thailand, yet with a significantly longer duration.[4] It positions me as "the subject of an experiment, allowing the world to work on me, reshaping my thinking and guiding my actions."[5] Over the years, I have

gained an intimate understanding, or to be more accurate, a taste/direct experience (*dhawq*), of my interlocutors' beliefs and practices. In some ways, making myself the subject of an experiment yields an unmediated and nonrepresentational lived experience of one of the most profound religious rituals of Islam.

DEFINING DHIKR

The Arabic word "dhikr" originates from the trilateral root *dh-k-r*. In the Quran, this root word occurs 292 times. Some of the meanings associated with *dh-k-r* are remembrance, recollection, reminiscence, to think, to recall, to recollect, to speak, to mention, to cite, to narrate, to designate, to indicate, and to name. "Then do ye remember Me; I will remember you" is the Quranic injunction most frequently recited by Sufis. The invocation is a circularity, a mutual exchange between the Lord and his servant, "an act of worship equally divided between God and His servant, half for God and half for His servant."[6] I often asked Amir how God reciprocates your remembrance of Him. He replied that being at peace is a gift from God, an indication that God remembers the self.

The significance of remembrance appears in other scholarly and religious traditions.[7] In *Phaedo*, Socrates conceives of recollection as a process of purification that aims "to separate the soul as far as possible from the body."[8] Recollection is an act of separating from earthly existence and uniting with the divine truth. In Christianity, recollection shifted to focus more on remembering God. For instance, in early Christian and medieval Christian monasteries, monks recited God's name in a meditational practice known as *mnēmē theou*, "memory of God," to "induce a prescribed way of emotionally marked-out stages toward divine *theoria*, or 'seeing.'"[9] God's memory becomes inculcated into an individual through remembrance, opening an eternal view inside the human subject. These traditions illustrate the value of remembrance as a recollection of divine origin, altering how people perceive the mundane.

Baba Jamil, a contemporary Sufi teacher and Amir's spiritual master, describes dhikr as a "journey (*safar*) within one's existence (*wujūd*)."[10] This metaphor of travel, frequently termed "wayfaring" in Sufi discourse, symbolizes the fleeting nature of life. Baba Jamil often stated, "Practice dhikr as if you are witnessing (*mushāhadah*) your self."[11] This emphasizes an immediate understanding of one's true nature, free from external influences. Like any journey, self-discovery is fraught with challenges, obstacles, and barriers. As is often discussed in Sufi teachings, negative thoughts—such as doubts regarding the existence of the inner self—hinder the wayfarer, with desires complicating the inward journey even further. Consequently, the difficulty in delving deep within oneself is termed the "greater struggle" (*al-jihād al-akbar*) and is recognized as an ongoing striving of the self against itself.

The reflective nature of dhikr and its emphasis on inner experience distinguish it from other Islamic rituals. As an embodied spiritual practice, dhikr integrates body and consciousness through a disciplined exercise. In this sense, "the meditative practice of dhikr is a transcending technique and a liberation process par excellence, because it enables the believer to 'disidentify' himself with any feeling, thought, or object of consciousness, and through this to open himself to the endless light of the ultimate, divine Reality."[12] As I show, my interlocutors passionately advocate the radical negation of thinking as an imperative of self-knowledge.

French scholar of Greek Antiquity Pierre Hadot's (1922–2010) framework of "spiritual exercise" also helps us understand dhikr. Hadot particularly highlighted the role of spiritual exercises in shaping desire and establishing an authentic presence of the self in the present moment.[13] Inspired by Plotinus's contemplation, Hadot argues that philosophy in ancient Greece was not an intellectual discipline. Instead, it was a spiritual exercise involving attention, vigilance, self-mastery, breathing, reading, dialogue, listening, meditation, and recollecting virtuous ideals. "Every spiritual exercise is dialogical insofar as it is an 'exercise of an authentic presence' of the self to itself, and of the self to others."[14] In other words, this spiritual exercise that journeys inward simultaneously unfolds the self into an outward social-historical reality. In the same way, "techniques which make it possible to go directly to God are in fact practices opening the way to the soul and leading the self back to the self."[15] Similarly, Islamic philosophy highlights practical wisdom, stating that it involves "curtailing the appetites and passions, allowing the soul to achieve practical wisdom."[16] Through bodily practices such as intentional breathing, dhikr meditation encapsulates this principle, engaging the theoretical paradigm of the anthropocosmic self.

Active Contemplation: Suspending the Senses

Sufi rituals forge a strong link between the body and emotions, often described as "deeply intellectual and experienced in embodied ways."[17] Within a Sufi philosophical context, dhikr is a pathway for inner exploration that transcends empirical observation and sensory knowledge. It requires setting aside physical senses and rational thought to connect with a pre-reflective inner self. For contemporary individuals, this introspective journey may feel akin to a psychological retreat, posing a risk of becoming trapped in one's ego, nurturing narcissistic tendencies, and possibly leading to alienation from others. However, reflecting on one's inner life also entails considering the internal other as an absolute external entity, creating a paradoxical state of being. Thus, perplexity is considered the pinnacle of knowledge in Sufi philosophical thought. Numerous esoteric traditions suggest that human existence navigates between the tangible and the imaginal realms, never entirely confined to either sphere.

In the tenth century, the Muslim philosopher Ibn Sina (also known as Avicenna) proposed a thought experiment involving a floating man. This man is suspended in midair, entirely cut off from sensory perception and the physical world. In this state, Ibn Sina argued that a person realizes their true self, independent of sensory experiences from the external environment.[18] While such complete sensory deprivation may be impractical, Sufi practitioners are traditionally urged to turn their senses inward toward infinity to negate external sense perception and welcome the unknown. This invisible does not manifest in dreams or sounds; it constantly eludes definition while remaining present as a subject within our reality.

Every Thursday night, we gathered in a rundown two-room house in Sultanabad, a low-income area south of Karachi. During my initial visit to the meditation room, Amir shared the theory behind dhikr. I won his trust and was warmly welcomed by several middle-aged men dressed in traditional attire. After exchanging ceremonial greetings, they readied themselves for meditation. At first, I hesitated to join, but Zafar, Baba Jamil's first disciple, encouraged me to join in the experience. Sufis regard the Thursday night communal dhikr as auspicious, and Zafar stressed that true joy comes from meditating rather than merely discussing it. He referred to meditation as *mazā*, a term in Sufi tradition that implies a direct, nonrepresentational experience.[19] This choice of words

was compelling, suggesting I was invited to "taste" the experience instead of merely conceptually understanding it. They aimed for me to have a firsthand encounter with contemplation.

Zafar added that dhikr brings peace and alleviates suffering, transforming negative ego-driven thoughts into positive ones. Others in the room supported his views, sharing their insights and experiences of meditation to persuade me to try it. Zafar also noted that God resides within our hearts, yet we fail to recognize this because our thoughts have occupied our hearts.[20]

The group contemplation starts with everyone sitting in a circle, followed by turning off the lights. After reciting sacred verses in honor of Prophet Muhammad, the participants begin to chant the declaration of Islamic faith (*Shahādah*), which signifies the oneness of God. With the body serving as a crucial tool for elevating consciousness from a material state to a divine one, individuals sit in a specific kneeling posture for as long as they can bear the position. After approximately twenty minutes of meditation, the legs grow numb as the blood flow gradually diminishes. Baba Jamil noted, "An evil nerve from the left foot connects directly to the spinal cord. When you sit on your left foot, this nerve stops interacting with the nervous system, impairing cognitive function."[21] The objective is to inhibit the mind's capacity to think, as thoughts—particularly troubling ones—do not accurately represent reality and can be outside conscious control. As traditional Islamic teaching notes, "Knowing was produced as much by the limbs as by the mind."[22]

The head is bent toward the knees and slowly raised to rest near the heart, reflecting the divine unity that emphasizes the heart's supremacy over the mind. Zafar advised, "Let the mind ascend (*miʿrāj*) to the heart."[23] "Ascendence" refers to the Prophet Muhammad's ascension to the heavens and meeting with the divine. However, Zafar reinterpreted this spiritual narrative as a contemporary inward journey, thereby internalizing the concept. The continuous counterclockwise head rotation strains the neck and head, heightening muscle fatigue in the shoulders and back. Zafar explained, "When we rotate our head in a circle, we distract our brain, which is always thinking. Instead, we aim to stop such thinking through rotation and attune ourselves to the heart."[24] After rotating the head for over an hour, the brain grows weary, its ability to hold thoughts diminishes, and it sheds unwanted thoughts.[25] Gananath Obeyesekere describes the suspension of thought as "aphoristic thinking" or "passive celebration," a key condition for achieving a phenomenological vision.[26]

During meditation, the eyes remain closed. This simple act is the first step toward suspending the senses and preparing for divine vision, as the eyes are considered to act as the primary link to the phenomenal world. However, closing one's eyes does not prevent one from "seeing." As soon as the eyes are shut, images from episodic memory emerge vividly. These thoughts are sharp and transparent, swiftly leading the subject into different scenes. By closing the eyes and concentrating on the point between the eyebrows, while rotating the head for over an hour, the influence of culturally conditioned perception may be diminished.[27]

Dhikr is considered to elevate perception, lifting it above obscuring phenomenal images in search of true vision. Contemplative exercises help a seeker ascend into the innermost layers of the soul, into the experience of the "unseen" or *al-Ghayb*. Mittermaier sees the unseen as a critique of the modern hegemony of the gaze.[28] It pushes us beyond sense perception, notably exceeding the optical consciousness, which has wholly gripped the imagination of a modern subject. The

unseen, as an intimate reality, releases the grip of positivist rationality by placing knowledge under radical erasure.

The recitation of *Lā ilāh illā Allāh*, which translates to "there is no god but God," fosters a deepened capacity for listening. Each repetition reinforces the essence of the declaration of faith—its affirmations and negations—drowning out the noise of everyday life and sharpening one's listening skills. Charles Hirschkind's research on cassette sermons in Egypt underscores the significance of this enhanced listening ability. He remarks, "Listening infuses the body with emotional potential, embedding them within the preconscious layers of kinesthetic and synesthetic experience, thereby granting the sensitive heart the primary organ of moral insight and action—its receptive abilities."[29] With ongoing practice over weeks and months, dhikr gradually mutes external sounds and whispers, lifting listening into a profound silence. In this domain, no sound, murmur, or vibration intrudes; all the ears perceive is silence. Jean-Luc Nancy argues that silence transcends mere absence, defining it as an "arrangement of resonance."[30] He elaborates that "in a complete state of silence, you perceive your own body resonate, your breath, your heartbeat, and the entire echoing cave of your being."[31] Engaging deeply with silence improves one's listening capabilities. Furthermore, in proper measures, integrating silence into spoken words enriches their meaning. As Luce Irigaray suggests, "Words must find their foundation in silence to carry meaning."[32] Unlike contemporary acoustics, which is often filled with dissonance, meditation can be considered to elevate the act of listening to a profound inner silence.

The Sacred Art of Breathing

Unlike the secular understanding of reducing breathing to merely a respiratory function, Sufis approach it as a profound spiritual technique that connects the individual to divine reality, a bridge to merge the sacred with the human. In dhikr meditation, each breath becomes a conscious remembrance and reflection, requiring practitioners to maintain an acute awareness of every inhalation and exhalation, transforming this automatic bodily function into a deliberate spiritual practice. As Baba Jamil explains, "You need to be mindful of your breath. As you inhale, recite *lā ilāh* (no god), symbolizing negation, and upon exhaling, say *illā Allāh* (but God), representing affirmation."[33] Through this practice, breathing becomes a vehicle for the fundamental Islamic principle of divine unity, carrying the dual movement of negation and affirmation into the practitioner's heart.

Baba Jamil's teaching reveals a sophisticated understanding of breath's metaphysical dimensions. "When I introduce breathing to someone new," he says, "I emphasize that the breath is God. I exhale and explain that it is invisible, eternal, and does not have family or offspring."[34] This description echoes Islamic theology's attributes of divine nature while making them tangible through the immediate experience of breathing. Furthermore, he offers a profound temporal perspective: "The present is equivalent to a single breath. The breath that has already occurred is history, while the yet-to-be breath is the future."[35] This framing liberates breath from chronological time, transforming it into a qualitative experience that aligns temporal awareness with the rhythms of respiration.

My ethnographic observations of Thursday night dhikr gatherings revealed the intense physical dimensions of breathing practices. The meditation room would fill with deep inhalations and exhalations as practitioners engaged in extended breathing exercises lasting over twenty-five

minutes. After one session, Amir explained the exercise: "To perform the breathing technique, you must inhale deeply by pressing on your belly and then exhale forcefully."[36] This practice culminates in *ḥabs-e-dam*—the advanced technique of holding one's breath while internally repeating the declaration of divine unity.

The historical depth of these practices is evidenced in classical texts. The seventeenth-century work *Compass of Truth* by Mughal Prince Dara Shikoh describes Sufis who had developed such extraordinary control over their breathing that they would take only three or four breaths, or sometimes just one, throughout an entire night.[37] These accounts suggest the historical continuity of breathing practices and their potential for transforming normal physiological functions. These breathing techniques induce profound alterations in bodily awareness and consciousness through sustained practice. Practitioners report a diminishing sensation in the lower body and a cessation of discursive thought, leading to a state of "flow." This experience, while resistant to verbal description, represents a fundamental shift in self-experience where the thinking-I withdraws and a different mode of awareness emerges. As noted, "Flow implies a level of physical reality that is epistemologically before we divide the world."[38]

The significance of the breath in spiritual practice extends beyond Sufism to encompass various esoteric traditions, including Buddhism and Hinduism. In Indic traditions, especially within yoga practices, the sacred art of breathing (Sanskrit: *prāṇāyāma*) is particularly advanced,[39] emphasizing breath control as a means to spiritual transformation. Scholars increasingly recognize connections between these diverse traditions through their approaches to breath control. Carl Ernst notes that "breath control and meditative practices are central themes when comparing Sufi and yogic traditions."[40]

The breath's mystical dimension additionally resonates in monotheistic religions, such as the Abrahamic faiths, where it carries profound theological significance, as exemplified in the account of God breathing life into Adam.[41] God's inspiration in clay (Adam) continues to permeate as a divine inspiration in the human spirit. Unsurprisingly, spirit and respiration share the same Latin root word, *spīrō*, signifying the intimate connection between breathing and spirituality. The Andalusian Sufi Ibn Arabi (d. 1240) articulated this concept philosophically, stating that "the breath is non-manifest in God and evident (*ẓāhir*) in creation."[42] These perspectives suggest that breath is a cosmic principle linking divine and human realms, forming the anthropocosmic self.

However, modern scientific paradigms have significantly altered our understanding of breathing. As philosopher David Levin observes, "The wisdom of breathing is the hardest and final lesson to grasp. What is most familiar often goes unnoticed; it drifts furthest from our consciousness."[43] The contemporary scientific worldview "has imposed on us a sense of transcendence, a moral doctrine, and concepts—not to mention an energy culture, particularly regarding breath."[44] This shift reflects a broader pattern of secularization and medicalization of formerly sacred practices. While the sacred art of breathing has shaped cosmological and self-perceptions, contemplation has become increasingly commodified in recent decades through the global yoga industry. Breathing exercises have become a national export for India, contributing to yoga's multibillion-dollar valuation and signaling a shift toward the marketization of respiration globally.[45] This is particularly true for multinational corporations now employing yoga practitioners to teach breathing techniques to their workforce, aiming to enhance productivity and

workplace wellbeing.[46] This commercialization represents a significant development in what Nile Green terms the "political economy of respiration."[47]

Despite the commodification of respiratory exercises, dhikr emphasizes breathing techniques to reveal the profound significance of breath awareness as a way of balancing the nondual character of the anthropocosmic self. Every inhale and exhale keep the body and the spirit intertwined to form a synchronized experience of the present, suspending the dialectical tension of the past and future. Breath awareness in Sufi contemplation is intended to be a radical annihilation of time, which makes dhikr a critical technique in self-formation.

THE ANTHROPOCOSMIC SELF

The Sufi tradition understands reality as a continuum, ranging from dense materiality to subtle spirit, from darkness to light, and from what is sensible to what is intelligible. Reality varies in intensity; sense perception is merely one layer of this complex structure. For Sufis, a part of the real always remains concealed and unmanifested. This worldview understands that there are three faculties of the soul: vegetative, animalistic, and rational.[48] The vegetative self depends on nutrition, and the animalistic self seeks sexual gratification and aggression. In contrast, the rational self yearns for divine knowledge—the path to the divine unfolds through the inner self. Thus this tripartite structure of being sums up Sufi psychology. Amir's portrayal of the self reflects these stages—his diagram outlined a gradation of being, modulating between the material and spiritual, often represented by a paradigmatic concept of the anthropocosmic self.

The anthropocosmic self exists in two time constructs. Sufis uniquely perceive time, distinguishing between two types. The first, absolute time (*dahr*), "can neither be completed nor destroyed."[49] This absolute time takes the form of a cycle, not a linear progression accumulating a past, but rather a time that cycles back to its origin.[50] For Muslims, this cyclical view of time, void of duration, serves not just as a measure but as a framework for interpretation—a resource for making meaning that enriches their understanding of the world. "Cyclical time leading back to the origin becomes itself an exegesis, the total exegesis of mankind, the archetype of all exegesis," Henry Corbin states.[51] This concept of cyclical time anticipates a return to the origin, the starting point of existence, the realm of the unborn and unmanifest. In Sufi tradition, the deep longing to reunite with this primordial state of being is termed love. Rumi's opening lines of the *Masnavi* express this yearning for eternal return through the metaphor of a reed flute.[52] He describes the flute's sound as the lament of a reed separated from its source. Thus, aspiring for union while living emerges as the ultimate goal of life for Sufis.

The second type of time is chronological time (*zaman*), shaped by Earth's rotation, the sun, and the stars. It signifies a pure mathematical interpretation of history, encompassing past, present, and future. Memory and anticipation represent two facets of chronological time. My conversation partners navigate between these two timeframes: chronological and absolute. They envision part of themselves within the chronological, caught in material time, while the other part exists in the absolute, considered outside of the bounds of consecutiveness. Dhikr aids them in reconciling these temporal dimensions with a deep contemplation of the inner self that merges the vertical and horizontal experiences of time. For instance, the darkest moment of the night, which occurs just before sunrise, is a sacred time for Sufis to deepen their existential experience through contemplation.

This nondual understanding of time presents human nature as a unified reality, illustrated by the idea of the perfect human. One aspect of the self is grounded in chronological time, which we perceive through the external senses, while the other resides in absolute time, experienced through the phenomenological contemplation of dhikr. The essence of the self is to embody both simultaneously,[53] unlike Émile Durkheim's concept of a dialogical modern self, which asserts that:

> Man is double. There are two beings in him: an individual being that has its foundation in the organism and the circle whose activities are therefore strictly limited, and a social being that represents the highest quality in the intellectual and moral order that we can know by observation—I mean society.[54]

Modern research methods equip us with various tools and skills, such as ethnographic techniques, social theory, and scientific instruments, to explore the anthropomorphic nature of humans. However, engaging with the cosmic aspect of the self, purported to exist beyond both physical and metaphysical realms, presents a formidable challenge and serves as a moral imperative highlighted by my interlocutors.

This nondual understanding of reality and time finds its fullest expression in the axiomatic logos of divine unity, which encompasses two dimensions: negation and affirmation, captured in the phrase "no god but God." This principle is the foundational article of faith in Islam, requiring Muslims to express their belief with the declaration, "There is no god but God." Baba Jamil and his followers devoted considerable time to elucidating this statement. In contrast to other Islamic practices like daily prayers, fasting, pilgrimage to Mecca (*hajj*), and 2.5 percent annual charity (*zakāh*), divine unity is not typically ritualized among ordinary Muslims. They regard it as a declaration, a clear monotheistic principle. Conversely, Sufis have cultivated a profound comprehension of divine unity by internalizing its fundamental logic through the meditative practice of dhikr.

The declaration of divine unity consists of two components. The first part, "There is no god," begins with negation (*lā* in Arabic or *nafi* in Urdu). Sufis interpret this negation as a means to cleanse the soul (*tazkiyat al-nafs.*). Baba Jamil frequently articulates negation (*nafi*), or "no god," as rejecting impurities like greed and lust within oneself. He also views negation as temporarily suspending the external senses of sight and sound. "Senses are akin to gods. The senses of sight, sound, taste, touch, and smell are deities. Do not rely on them. Negate them during meditation," Baba Jamil asserts.[55] He offers a tangible perspective on "no god," symbolizing sensory experiences. Thus, "god" does not signify abstract divinity but relates to specific bodily attributes and organs.

Although Baba Jamil rarely cites texts, one of the oldest Sufi works, *Kashf al-Maḥjūb*, by tenth-century saint ʻAlī al-Hujwīrī, describes negation as the "negation of human attributes and affirmation as the acknowledgment of Truth's power."[56] Some view negation as a radical form of self-destruction, where one renounces vital life forces by abstaining from food. However, Baba Jamil challenges this notion, interpreting negation as reconciliation (*al-'Iṣlāḥ*)—a process that redirects desire inward, moving the focus from the outer world to the inner noumenal realm. He promoted the correction of desire, advocating for a balance between the inner self and the external

world while harmonizing the historical with the eternal. His understanding of negation remains rooted in sensory experiences.[57]

The latter half of divine unity refers to "but God." This notion acts as an affirmation (*athbāt*) or a cataphatic statement. Accurately describing affirmation is difficult because it slips into negation if it can be expressed. Affirmation goes beyond meaning and remains in a state of deferral—nameless and nonrepresentational. Similar to the total negation of deities, affirmation embodies both singularity and universality, cosmic reality, and the unknown. For Sufis, affirmation eludes the phenomenal world, as it is constantly influenced by historical factors, leading to potential errors. It is absent from both language and awareness. Existentially, true affirmation can only be realized through a deep, intimate experience of rapture and joy within one's heart.

Sufis associate negation with the mind and affirmation with the heart. The mind focuses on rational thinking and conceptual comprehension, while the heart embodies the true self, a profound secret within one's essence. The first stage of meditation seeks to negate sensory knowledge, and the second affirms a unified cosmic reality felt within the heart. This journey turns Sufi dhikr into a profoundly kinesthetic experience, shaping body and consciousness together. However, the contemplative nature of dhikr and the anthropocosmic self are deeply intertwined with daily life, challenging the conventional view of spiritual practice as merely normative techniques or isolated activities. As I illustrate in the following section, my interlocutors engage in dhikr amid the chaos of life, often marked by political violence in Pakistan.

CONTEMPLATION IN CRITICAL TIMES

Amir's diagram of the anthropocosmic self, rooted in classical Sufi tradition, suggests a diverse environment where such ideas can thrive. If cosmological perspectives have infiltrated the modern bazaar, particularly within a moneychanger's office in Karachi's bustling fashion district, then these ideas can be considered to carry a certain legacy and currency in the present. If the emanationist viewpoint continues to influence individuals' self-perception, it shows that fundamentalist ideologies do not entirely override the hermeneutical landscape. This complex dynamic makes the Sufi understanding of reality fascinating to explore. Particularly striking is how these lower-middle-class people in Pakistan are practicing—nurturing an anthropomorphic self rooted in ancient philosophical views of the cosmos and self-identity, which were once the province of the educated elite during the era of the Ottoman, Mughal, and Safavid empires.

The Sufi understanding of the self in modern societies has survived the effects of European colonialism, Muslim reform movements, and market dynamics. Some may regard this concept of the self as a remnant of the past, incompatible with modernity and the prevailing trends in Islam today. Over the past two centuries, modernity has reshaped Islam, prioritizing jurisprudence over esoteric practices. This transformation is mainly due to European influences on Muslim pedagogy and religious frameworks, leading to a dominance of prescriptive Islam over explorative Islam.[58] Despite these changes, the Sufi ethos plays a crucial role in the spiritual sensibility of South Asian Muslims.

Sufi philosophical practices have played an instrumental role in shaping Muslim subjectivities for centuries. By offering the promise of divine vision, this Islamic mystical tradition has nurtured a particular subjectivity different from the modern notion of self. Sufi groups and lodges were also

the most critical learning spaces for the majority of Muslims in the premodern Islamicate.[59] However, Sufi Islam has come under direct attack in the last few decades. Islamic literalists see Sufism as an aberration and, thus, heretical to the teachings of Prophet Muhammad. In Pakistan alone, extremist groups have bombed almost all the major Sufi shrines, including the eighth-century shrine of ʻAbd Allāh Shāh Ghāzī on the edge of the Arabian Sea, resulting in several deaths. It has been an unfortunate coincidence that the last two shrines—the thirteenth-century Sufi shrine of Laʻal Shahbāz Qalandar in Sindh and Bilāwal Shāh Norānī in Balochistan—I visited within a space of three months experienced massive suicide attacks, murdering hundreds of innocent pilgrims in 2016–2017. Frequented by the most marginalized and historically disenfranchised sections of the population, the Sufi shrines offer a place of spiritual solace to pilgrims, irrespective of their religious background. The frequency with which Sufis are coming under attack across the Muslim world, from Morocco to Malaysia, urgently calls for a heightened sense of understanding of Islam's inner tradition. This article advocates for a more significant response to some of the crises and challenges facing Muslims who are being torn asunder by the forces of modernity and religious fundamentalism.

The tide of modernity, too, has forced people to surrender the cosmological understanding of existence. It has divorced cosmology from subjectivity, leaving people with an impoverished ontology reduced to superficial experiences of sense perception. It has abandoned the inner self as a theoretical construct and replaced it with a crude empirical reality observable to the external senses. Maurice Merleau-Ponty stated, "Truth does not merely 'dwell' in the 'inner man'; or rather, there is no 'inner man,' man is in and toward the world, and it is in the world that he knows himself."[60] In place of interiority, modern rationality inaugurated an "egoism of the I" and robbed sensibility of its potentialities, especially its orientation to the absolute Other.[61] Stefania Pandolfo calls it the "secularization of the *nafs* [self]."[62] It means the absolute Other, outside of time and space, does not shape the human subjectivity of a modern man.

Despite the dominance of empirical and secular worldviews, many cultures—including contemporary Sufi circles—retain cosmological frameworks that offer alternative ways of understanding the self. This is particularly evident in how Amir and Baba Jamil articulate their experiences of dhikr, enabling them to create meaningful phenomenological experiences of reality that transcend time and space. Yet they find themselves in a context inhabited by different ideological perspectives, making contemplation not just a religious ritual practiced in isolation but an ongoing exercise embedded in a web of relations. Following this exploration of the sociopolitical context of dhikr, the next section examines how spiritual masters transmit these teachings.

CONTEMPLATIVE CHAINS: A MASTER, HIS DISCIPLES, AND THE ART OF TRANSMISSION

In his mid-fifties, Baba Jamil guides a small Sufi group in a northern Punjab village near Gujrat in Pakistan, and he occasionally visits some of his disciples in Karachi, where I met him. Rather than identifying as a Sufi, he prefers the label *malang* (ascetic). This term represents a rejection of the rules and structures of organized religion, encapsulating the radical and subversive aspects of Sufism. For example, an ascetic does not follow the requirement of performing five daily prayers,

which are crucial for Muslims to enact their faith in Islam. The demeanor of an ascetic is often compared to that of one entranced by divine love, showing little interest in scholarly knowledge. Baba Jamil believes that formal education obstructs the inner journey into the unknown. He suggests that the true self, hidden deep within existence, remains inaccessible if one is caught up in intellectual pursuits. One can develop a yearning for the invisible by freeing the imagination from preconceived notions. In my initial discussions with him, I noted Baba Jamil's intense disdain for my formal education. Any mention of texts, events, or prominent Sufi figures was met with dismissal. "Return to yourself" were his frequent words when I tried to introduce academic knowledge. He held the oral tradition in the highest regard, as it linked him to the lived experiences transmitted through the Sufi lineage.

The "spiritual lineage," or *shajra*, symbolizes the genealogies of Sufi brotherhoods. Each Sufi order maintains a family tree that ensures an unbroken chain of knowledge transmission. By linking to authentic lineages, Sufis receive sacred validation. For example, Baba Jamil's spiritual lineage traces back from him to his spiritual leader, Sufi Naqib ullah Shah, followed by Khawaja Sufi Hasan Shah, who was laid to rest in India. This lineage eventually connects to Prophet Muhammad in the seventh century, spanning forty-four generations. Predominantly, Sufis in Baba Jamil's lineage reside in India. These lineages traverse various regions, crossing national boundaries and encompassing numerous historical eras. His lineage features Sufis, Shia Imams, the Prophet's daughter Fatima,[63] and the Prophet himself, reaching across the Indian Subcontinent, Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq, and Saudi Arabia. It signifies an unbroken chain (*silsilah*) that reflects the efforts of fourteen centuries, honored and recited every Thursday night after dhikr. Consequently, the idea of the anthropocosmic self and the dhikr practice emerged from the divine unknown realm, revealed to Prophet Muhammad, and handed down through his family (*ahl al-bayt*), saints, and eventually to ordinary people. However, not every spiritual lineage is considered authentic; some fabricate false lineages to gain a perceived cosmological legitimacy and mislead those seeking spiritual solace.

Baba Jamil regards dhikr as a secret passed down orally from chest to chest (*sina ba sina*). This refers to transmitting qualities from a Sufi master to his disciple. However, this privilege belongs to the spiritual master, whom he considers worthy of imparting such knowledge. He believes that not everyone pursues self-knowledge or can grasp the secrets of the self. In Sufi cosmology, these secrets represent divine signs hidden deeply within the unconscious. A spiritual master must cultivate disciples, termed *rāz dār*, who can safeguard the esoteric secrets of the self. It is a well-recognized principle in Sufism that one cannot access the true self without the guidance of a spiritual master. The significance of the spiritual master is emphasized in the poetry of the seventeenth-century Punjabi Sufi poet Sultan Bahu, as illustrated in the following verses.

> The letter Alif of God's name is a jasmine flower
> And my Guide has planted in my heart
> Watering with the negation and affirmation
> (watering) each vein and each pore—He
> May my beautiful guide live forever
> Whose hand planted this flower—He.[64]

In Sufi folk poetry, the spiritual master is depicted as a genuine master who sees beyond the facade of ego and instills dhikr in a disciple. "The transmission of a prayer formula (*dhikr*) from master to disciple, for example, is described as the injection of seed or semen into the soil or womb of the disciple."[65] The planting of the dhikr seed, its growth, and eventual development into a plant occur under the guidance of a spiritual master.

Baba Jamil identifies himself as a sign (*nishān*), emphasizing that his purpose is to guide his disciples toward their path. He states, "I will not journey within you. However, when you face obstacles on your quest for truth, I will assist you in overcoming them."[66] This statement clarifies his role as a spiritual master who facilitates the seeker's introspective journey rather than undertaking it on their behalf and underscores the metaphor of a journey that frequently characterizes dhikr, which represents an exploration into oneself. Throughout our many discussions, he passionately urges us to explore our inner selves, asserting that individuals are microcosms unto themselves. This perspective aligns with Sufi thought, which firmly upholds the nondual essence of the self, contrasting the external, anthropomorphic self with the internal self, which embodies the cosmos.

I asked several questions when Baba Jamil visited his disciples in Karachi: How many layers must we peel away to reveal our true selves? Moreover, how can we be sure that this true self is within us? He quickly grabbed the ashtray, buried a matchstick under the debris, and challenged me to find it. As I began to sift through the ashes, he paused to ask what I was doing. I explained that I was removing the ash to locate the matchstick. He replied that one must first eradicate internal impurities to let the true self emerge naturally. Baba Jamil stressed the importance of constant negation, as life continuously adds layers that obscure our essence and soul. He employs various analogies and metaphors to help new individuals and remind his disciples of the hidden reality within themselves. However, he is passionate about guiding individuals toward an inward reality through direct means, even dismissing textual references. According to him, every conversation should stem from the pure experience of one's interiority.

During our conversation, Amir also expressed the same notion of the journey inside the self. "Ascending is inward. Allah lives within oneself, not outside."[67] His choice of words—*apne andar* (within oneself)—proves particularly revealing. This phrase does more than indicate direction; it gestures toward something distinct, marking his interpretation as separate from orthodox views. For Amir, "within oneself" reveals the very meaning of inwardness itself. It signifies a "recovery of the body's preexistence and past."[68] When he attempts to convey these inner experiences, he turns to affective language—speaking of peace, stillness, and rapture. These descriptions indicate an experiential reality central to the Sufi tradition, inviting deeper exploration. However, Amir also employs more violent metaphors, sometimes depicting interiority as a slaughterhouse (*maqtal*) or battlefield where thoughts must be killed, desires uprooted, and evil whispers ambushed. These vivid metaphors show that the real spiritual work happens inside oneself. The external world merely reflects these inner struggles, with the heart serving as the seat of true inwardness and the tongue acting as a veil between inner and outer realms.

Amir meditates every night at home and never misses the Thursday collective dhikr. He feels an addiction to contemplation. "My body craves the intoxication from dhikr," he explains. "Sometimes my legs hurt, my back aches, telling me to skip dhikr for a night. However, I tell my body to stop finding excuses. As soon as I start meditation, the pain disappears," he continued.[69]

The "ego," or *nafs*, the base soul, deceives an individual and acts cunningly. If a person is not more cunning than their ego, they will stop remembering their creator. Amir expresses that anything between you and meditation is a deceit orchestrated by one's lower self, which desires indulgence in base desires. He often boasts of performing dhikr at the nearby beach, Paradise Point, in the middle of the night. "I could hear the sound of crabs crawling on the slippery rocks in the pitch darkness on the shore; the sea breeze sounded like a noise from a horror movie, and it tried to scare me, forced me to run away," Amir reminisced with a sense of devotion. "In the beginning days of dhikr, after rotating my head for an hour or two, my head barely stayed on my torso. I have to hold it with both hands. It was excruciating," says Amir.[70] He shared dhikr anecdotes with excitement and in melancholic tones. He missed having the same burning passion and rigor for dhikr as he had twenty years ago when he first came to Baba Jamil for financial guidance. Instead of business advice, Baba Jamil gave him a contemplative exercise. "We are getting old now. Our bodies do not have the energy they once used to have when Baba Jamil, too, was finding his way to the truth," said Amir.[71]

He recounts his first meeting with Baba Jamil: "My first encounter with Baba Jamil was coincidental. When I first saw him, his eyes were bright red, as if he had taken a potent drug or intoxicant. He was lying on the bed in just his pants and undershirt. Baba noticed my astonishment and immediately reassured me, saying, 'We are not high on drugs; do not worry.'"[72] However, Baba Jamil believes that his meeting with Amir was no coincidence; he contends there was a deliberate plan. "I am simply a keeper of knowledge. Those to whom it belongs will come and claim it from me," Baba Jamil explained during a subsequent meeting with me in his village in Gujrat. "In the past, Amir was unruly. He wore a gold chain around his neck, rode a motorbike, and roamed wildly. I transformed him into a human (*insān*)," Baba Jamil remembers.[73] As a spiritual master guiding mostly men from rural backgrounds, Baba Jamil sees his effort as transformative in bringing radical changes in his disciples' lives—a fact often recognized by his intimate followers like Amir and Zafar.

Amir does not participate in traditional religious practice, such as performing the five daily prayers. He often criticizes mainstream orthodoxy that emphasizes public displays of piety. At times, he expresses frustration toward Islamic legal scholars (*muftī*), feeling that they reduce Islam to mere legal formalities, and he often voices his discontent with how pilgrimage rituals are carried out. "The true pilgrimage is one of the heart," he shared with me, echoing a humble Sufi perspective.[74] He embraces a bohemian lifestyle, describing himself as *mast*—Sufi terminology signifying a detachment from material concerns and a deep love for God. Growing up in the mainly Urdu-speaking Mohajir neighborhoods during the 1980s and 1990s, he observed the ethnic and religious strife that affected the city.[75]

Zafar is Baba Jamil's first disciple; he hails from a rural area of northern Punjab and serves as a commando in the Pakistan Navy. Despite being the same age as Amir, their dispositions could not be more different: Zafar shares his thoughts only when asked. As the first disciple, he is tasked with maintaining the group, overseeing the meditation room, and keeping in touch with other disciples across various cities. He reaches out to everyone regularly as part of his duties. "My life changed dramatically after meeting Baba Jamil; before that, it was different," Zafar remarked.[76] Each group member has a compelling story about their encounter and initiation. A common theme among these narratives is the transition from a troubled past to a state of blissful intoxication

(*nashā*). “You will also experience this intoxication if you practice dhikr for thirty days,” he confidently stated in the room.[77]

The master-disciple relationship is essential for transmitting knowledge and values beyond formal institutions. Despite interruptions and changes, this relationship continues to be a crucial source of grace and blessings for a broader audience outside Sufi Islam. This apprenticeship fosters continuity with tradition, connecting followers to an unbroken chain of sages during periods of social upheaval. This inheritance of the past, paired with cosmic reality, creates a profound self-conceptualization often referred to as the anthropocosmic self, which is expressed deeply in the contemplative exercise of dhikr.

CONCLUSION

This ethnographic study and introduction of dhikr among contemporary Sufi practitioners in Pakistan illustrates how traditional contemplative practices continue to shape Muslim subjectivity, bridging the material and the spiritual. Despite pressures from religious fundamentalists and modern rationalists, who seek to separate subjectivity from cosmology, dhikr endures as a means of actualizing the anthropocosmic self. This selfhood transcends modern definitions by merging history and eternity into a singular experience of being. Yet, this concept remains underexplored in scholarship, where the historical-sensory aspects of selfhood often eclipse its cosmological dimensions.

The persistence of dhikr—transmitted through master-disciple lineages and embodied in breathing techniques and bodily rituals—demonstrates the resilience of Sufi philosophical thought in everyday life. In a rapidly changing world, dhikr is more than spiritual remembrance; it constitutes a reassertion of interiority and a means of transcending personal ego to cultivate a more ethical and virtuous community. By emphasizing breath awareness and sensory withdrawal, contemporary Sufi circles adapt dhikr to modern contexts, resisting the fragmentation of selfhood induced by techno-scientific consumer culture. As an enduring contemplative practice, dhikr affirms the power of inner experience in an era dominated by external appearances.

NOTES

[1] "Al-Baqarah," Quran.com, translated by Abdullah Yusuf Ali, accessed August 27, 2025, https://quran.com/2?startingVerse=152&translations=22.
[2] All interviews and conversations with interlocutors, including Amir, were conducted in Urdu and translated into English by the author. Amir, personal communication, Karachi, May 22, 2015.
[3] Amir, personal communication, Karachi, May 22, 2015.
[4] Klima, *Funeral Casino*.
[5] Jackson, *Lifeworlds*, 5.
[6] Ibn al-'Arabī, *Bezels of Wisdom*, 279.
[7] In Hebrew, the word *zakhor*, meaning remembrance, is a cognate of *dh-k-r*. The word "remember" has always been of great importance and is regularly repeated in religious texts as noted by Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, who asserts that the Hebrew verb *zakhor* serves as an admonishment, a mnemonic mark onto the Jewish psyche, a "religious imperative" to remember "God's act of intervention in history." See Yerushalmi, *Zakhor*, 11.
[8] Cooper and Hutchinson, Plato, 58.
[9] Carruthers and Ziolkowski, *Medieval Craft of Memory*, 2.
[10] Baba Jamil, personal communication, Karachi, June 23, 2015.
[11] Baba Jamil, personal communication, Karachi, June 23, 2015.
[12] Raid Al-Daghistani, "Sufis," 189.
[13] Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*.
[14] Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, 20.
[15] Jambet, "The Constitution of the Subject and Spiritual Practice," 245.
[16] Azadpur, *Reason Unbound*, 59.
[17] Marsden, *Living Islam*, 243.
[18] Kaukua, *Self-Awareness in Islamic Philosophy*, chap. 2.
[19] Zafar, personal communication, Karachi, December 14, 2016.
[20] Zafar, personal communication, Karachi, December 14, 2016.
[21] Baba Jamil, personal communication, Karachi, December 15, 2016.
[22] Ware, *Walking Qur'an*, 49.
[23] Zafar, personal communication, Karachi, December 14, 2016.
[24] Zafar, personal communication, Karachi, December 14, 2016.
[25] In Sufi philosophical discussions, head rotation is often compared to a millstone (*chakkī*) that grinds wheat into flour. The head circles the torso like a millstone, compressing thoughts between negation and affirmation. This spinning cultivates a circular consciousness with a focused center, breaking down the linear thinking imposed by modern progress.
[26] Obeyesekere, *Awakened Ones*.
[27] On the centrality of vision, see Levin, *Modernity and the Hegemony of Vision*.
[28] Mittermaier, "Unknown in the Egyptian Uprising," 19.
[29] Hirschkind, *Ethical Soundscape*, 79.
[30] Nancy, *Listening*, 21.
[31] Nancy, *Listening*, 21.
[32] Irigaray, "To Begin with Breathing Anew," 220.
[33] Baba Jamil, personal communication, Karachi, December 15, 2016.
[34] Baba Jamil, personal communication, Karachi, December 15, 2016.
[35] Baba Jamil, personal communication, Karachi, December 15, 2016.
[36] Amir, personal communication, Karachi, May 22, 2015.
[37] Shikoh, *Risala Haq Numa of Dara Shikoh*, 13.
[38] Obeyesekere, *Awakened Ones*, 159.
[39] Alter, *Yoga in Modern India*, 18–25.
[40] Ernst, "Situating Sufism and Yoga," 17.
[41] Quran 15:29.
[42] Ibn al-'Arabī, *Bezels of Wisdom*, 54.

[43] Levin, "Logos and Psyche," 129.
[44] Irigaray, "To Begin with Breathing Anew," 217–226, cited 219.
[45] On this phenomenon, see van der Veer, "Global Breathing."
[46] McCormick, "Spirituality and Management;" Schmidt-Wilk, Alexander, and Swanson, "Developing Consciousness in Organizations."
[47] Green, "Breathing in India," 283.
[48] Ibn Miskawayh, *Refinement of Character*, 14–15.
[49] Corbin, *Cyclical Time & Ismaili Gnosis*, 31.
[50] Corbin, *Cyclical Time & Ismaili Gnosis*, 35.
[51] Corbin, *Cyclical Time & Ismaili Gnosis*, 36.
[52] Rumi, *Masnavi*, 4.
[53] The Quran mentions three kinds of self: (1) A verse addresses the self as "that which incites to evil" (*al-nafs al-ammārah bil-su*, 12:53); (2) it is designated as "the self that blames" (*al-nafs al-lawwamah*, 75:2); and (3) it is described as "the serene self" (*al-nafs al-mutma'innah*, 89:27). These can also be seen as different stages of consciousness, the lowest being the animal/base instinct and the highest being the one united with the transcendental.
[54] Durkheim, *Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, 15.
[55] Baba Jamil, personal communication, Karachi, December 15, 2016.
[56] Hujvīrī, *Kashf al-Mahjūb*, 23.
[57] In Christian mysticism, a more radical interpretation known as kenosis highlights self-emptying to allow for God's will. This negation is essential to negative theology, or the apophatic method of grasping the affirmative. The core concept of negation asserts that one cannot fully understand the essence of God; instead, God is "known" through negation, which involves dismissing every conceivable phenomenon, including culturally constructed views of God. By consistently rejecting or misinterpreting this knowledge, one dismantles preconceived judgments, lessens the tendency to impose beliefs on others, and enables the truth to emerge itself.
[58] This is the central thesis of Shahab Ahmed's *What Is Islam?*
[59] In medieval societies, Sufi spiritual masters enjoyed considerable sovereign status alongside political sovereignty. In modernity, however, we find the role of the spiritual master dramatically reduced in regard to the political sphere. For more information on the history of Sufism, see Ansari, *Sufi Saints and State Power*; Moin, *Millennial Sovereign*; and Green, *Sufism*.
[60] Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 21.
[61] Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 58.
[62] Pandolfo, *Knot of the Soul*, 11.
[63] As a central figure in the Prophet's family, Fatima embodies purity and chastity and is honored as the cherished mother of the martyr Hussain, who was killed in the battle of Karbala in 680 AD.
[64] Bahu and Elias, *Death Before Dying*, 24.
[65] Malamud, "Gender and Spiritual Self-Fashioning," 90.
[66] Baba Jamil, personal communication, Karachi, December 15, 2016.
[67] Amir, personal communication, Karachi, May 22, 2015.
[68] Bashir, *Sufi Bodies*, 33.
[69] Amir, personal communication, Karachi, May 22, 2015.
[70] Amir, personal communication, Karachi, May 22, 2015.
[71] Amir, personal communication, Karachi, May 22, 2015.
[72] Amir, personal communication, Karachi, May 22, 2015.
[73] Baba Jamil, personal communication, Karachi, December 15, 2016.
[74] Amir, personal communication, Karachi, May 22, 2015.
[75] The once-dominant Mohajir community came into direct conflict with other ethnic groups, such as Sindhi, Pakhtun, and Punjabi, over issues of resource distribution, civic infrastructure, and competing claims to Pakistani nationhood. This strife tore at the city's cultural and socioeconomic fabric, revealing fault lines that persist in different forms to this day.
[76] Zafar, personal communication, Karachi, December 14, 2016.
[77] Zafar, personal communication, Karachi, December 14, 2016.

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