

**Contextualizing Khwaja Sira Rights:
Toward a History of the Pakistani State's Gender and Sexuality Politics**

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Between 2009-12, the Pakistani Supreme Court, in a series of rulings, granted rights and privileges to gender ambiguous people, who have locally come to be known as *khwaja siras*. The state sought to regulate and “mainstream” khwaja siras through these legal developments, and to this end, the judiciary devised a system to manage this segment of the population. What remains unclear is how these legal transformations have transpired in Pakistan, a country known both for discriminatory laws towards women and a dismal record of gender equality. This paper attempts to trace a brief history of gender and sexuality politics in Pakistan as a means to understand how past events informed the Supreme Court’s decision to grant rights to khwaja siras. I argue that policy reform inspired by colonial morality as well as the postcolonial drive for both modernization and cultural preservation have motivated the Pakistani state’s preoccupation with controlling the bodies of its male and female citizens, and that too in a highly discriminatory manner. These histories have collectively shaped the state’s vexed and ambiguous relationship with and treatment of gender and sexuality, while playing a critical role in the production of the contemporary judicial discourse on khwaja sira rights.