

## RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Overcoming resistance to resistance in public administration: Resistance strategies of marginalized publics in citizen-state interactions

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## Summary

There has been a general resistance to resistance studies in public administration (PA) research. Although previous research has documented instances of selective policy implementation by PA practitioners that put minority groups at a comparative disadvantage, we still have a limited understanding of the different ways in which these groups contest discriminatory administrative practices especially within non-western developing countries. To address this gap, in this article, I discuss the various strategic responses the Khawaja Sira—a genderqueer group of Pakistan—employ in their interactions with the frontline police workers to contest their hyper-surveillance and moral policing. The discussion illustrates that while Khawaja Sira mostly rely on individual acts of contestation in their interactions with police officers, the emerging leadership of the Khawaja Sira is enabling emergence of new forms of resistance based on social capital and collective protests. In addition to contributing to the limited literature on citizen perspectives and LGBT issues in PA research, the theoretical framework of resistance presented here can serve as a good template to analyze citizen responses to discriminatory frontline practice in other sociopolitical contexts as well.

## KEYWORDS

citizen-state interactions, developing countries, discrimination, genderqueer groups, policing, resistance, street-level bureaucracy, transgender

## 1 | INTRODUCTION

Finding research on resistance—“a social action that involves agency; and that act is carried out in some kind of oppositional relation to power” (Johansson & Vinthagen, 2016, p. 418)—in public administration (PA) scholarship is a disappointing endeavor. Despite its obvious importance for a comprehensive understanding of organizational change and citizen-state interactions, there has been a “resistance to resistance” (Nord & Jermier, 1994) within PA research. The little research that has been carried out has, almost exclusively, focused on resistance to organizational or policy change (Coetsee, 1993; Kumar, Kant, & Amburgey, 2007; Michener & Ritter, 2017). Except for a few normative analyses (Catlaw & Egan, 2016; Fox, 2003; Nord & Jermier, 1994), almost no empirical research has investigated the different ways in which citizens, especially minority groups, contest the transgressions of a surveilling state or discriminatory bureaucratic practices. This is a particularly important gap in PA

scholarship because as awareness increases about the role of administrative transgressions in persistent social inequity, for example, in the context of street-level policing (Chu, Lu, Wang, & Tsai, 2016; Epp, Maynard-Moody, & Haider-Markel, 2014; Nicholson-Crotty, Nicholson-Crotty, & Fernandez, 2017), it is even more important to document and analyze the different contestation strategies used by the marginalized groups to resist such frontline practices.

This gap exists primarily because of two underlying normative assumptions in most PA research; that the primary target audience of our research are the PA practitioners—not the public—and they have a predominantly positive functional role in society (Catlaw, 2007; Farmer, 2003b; Nisar, 2015). Consequently, PA researchers are often guilty of trying to “legitimize the administrative state” by discussing those administrator-citizen interactions that reaffirm our affinity to the role of PA as a productive discipline while “downplaying abhorrent ones” (Fox, 2003, p. 63). For example, the Black Lives Matter movement, which has highlighted the plight of the African American

community at the receiving end of selective implementation of law by police and other agencies of the state, is critical for our understanding of the PA practitioner. However, because such movements that problematize this sanitized version of the PA practitioner remain understudied in our discipline despite their relevance to the research on street-level bureaucracy and urban public management. Similarly, the response of the PA community to movements—such as the Occupy Wall Street movement—where citizens try to protest socio-economic inequality and reassert their right over public space and governance is also insightful. As Catlaw and Eagan (2016) note in the context of the Occupy movement, the sit-ins by the protesters were mostly “framed as problems of public safety, sanitation, and waste removal.” Such a framing reduced the occupiers trying to reassert their rights in the public places “to giant leaps of waste by police and city officials” and reinforced the fabrication of bureaucrats as agents of “cleaning and civilizing urban space” (Catlaw & Eagan, 2016). However, this movement also failed to generate any debate or introspection in our discipline.

Even in the few cases where discrimination in frontline practice is acknowledged, citizens are almost always presented as passive recipients of selective implementation by frontline workers of the government. Their agency—the ability to contest or frustrate discriminatory frontline officers—continues to remain understudied and undertheorized. Consequently, PA that should have been the academic discipline at the forefront of predicting the increasingly fractured citizen-state relationship culminating in unexpected recent developments such as the Brexit and rise of the far-right movements has remained peripheral to these important developments.

To address this important gap in previous research, in this article, I empirically analyze the different resistance strategies used by the Khawaja Sira—a genderqueer marginalized group—of Pakistan during their everyday interactions with frontline workers of the police. The Khawaja Sira (or Hijras as they are called in neighboring India) are often at the receiving end of discriminatory frontline practice and are often forced to resort to an array of resistance strategies to frustrate the disciplinary pressures of discriminatory police workers.

In doing so, this article makes the following broad theoretical contributions: First, it contributes to the limited literature on resistance studies in PA by presenting a theoretically informed empirical account of different resistance strategies employed by marginalized groups during citizen-state interactions. My research also problematizes the predominantly negative conceptualization of resistance in PA research and highlights that for some groups, resistance against street-level bureaucracy is not only justified but also the only option available to access urban public spaces. The theoretical framework presented here can also serve as a good template to analyze citizen responses to discriminatory frontline practice in other sociopolitical contexts. Second, without discounting the significance of discriminatory frontline practices, this research presents evidence that contests the image of marginalized citizens as passive actors in citizen-state interactions and highlights the number of ways in which they manage to live to fight another day against overwhelming odds. In doing so, this research also contributes to the limited literature on citizen perspectives in PA. Finally, as most research on citizenship in general and LGBT related research in particular has been done primarily in western developed

countries, it is important to expand the PA canon to the developing world contexts to understand the different ways in which PA practice intersects with social equity ideals in different sociopolitical contexts. Through a theoretically informed empirical analysis of the interactions between a gender queer group and the frontline workers of government in Pakistan, this article contributes to the limited research on the citizenship of genderqueer groups in developing countries.

## 2 | RESISTANCE TO RESISTANCE IN PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION RESEARCH

*[T]he paradigm case of administrator-citizen interaction is not, as we would like, co-production. Rather being confronted by cops and other agents of behavioral coercion is the paradigm case. (Fox, 2003, p. 63)*

The interaction between a street-level bureaucrat and a citizen is perhaps the fundamental subject matter of PA research as in this citizen-administrator interaction formal public policy (written law, rules, and policy) becomes realized (or implemented) public policy. A critical factor in this transition from formal to realized public policy is the discretionary decision making of street-level bureaucrats. As policy implementation researchers have highlighted, street-level bureaucrats enjoy a great degree of discretion because of unpredictable nature of their job, high work load, and limited resources (Lipsky, 1980; Maynard-Moody & Musheno, 2003). Moreover, due to powerful group norms and peer influence, street-level bureaucrats often exhibit systematic patterns of discretion. Although some of these aspects—such as devising ways to reduce their cognitive load—are value neutral (they do not influence social equity outcomes), other systematic patterns of discretion can influence marginalized social groups.

For example, while investigating the myriad citizen-state interactions in frontline organizations, researchers have illustrated that despite neutral public policies, discriminatory discretionary decisions by street-level bureaucrats result in disproportionate administrative burden and marginalization experienced by minority groups. A classic example of such discretionary decision making is the systematic marginalization experienced by minority groups at traffic police in the United States as documented by Epp et al. (2014). Similarly, in an experimental study, Schram, Soss, Fording, and Houser (2009) found that minority groups were comparatively more likely to be sanctioned by social welfare workers if they had a discrediting social marker. Phrases such as *driving while black* (Harris, 1999; Lundman & Kaufman, 2003) or *walking while trans* (Buist & Lenning, 2015; Daum, 2015; Edelman, 2014) further highlight the ever-present threat of hyper-surveillance and prosecution by frontline workers for minority groups. Although previous research has elucidated these discriminatory discretionary decision-making patterns of frontline decision making, we still have a limited understanding of the different ways in which marginalized social groups experience and respond to such discriminatory decision-making patterns.

An important reason for this limitation in previous PA research is the general reluctance of PA researchers to directly engage with the citizens who are the clients of public organizations. For example, most

PA research on public participation (Nisar, 2015), red tape (Moynihan & Herd, 2010), and policy implementation has focused on bureaucrats instead of the citizens they work with. Another important reason for this pattern of research is the sanitized version of PA practice that is taken for granted in our discipline (Farmer, 2003b; Fox, 2003). Consequently, citizen perspectives that problematize this conception of the PA practice are either not studied or their significance is downplayed in PA research.

That is why some researchers have called for a fundamental shift in the normative and empirical focus of PA scholarship and a deeper engagement with the idea of social marginalization and the contribution of PA to it. For example, Farmer (2003a) has called for “PA theory to become more self-consciously aware of its own relationship to power” (p. 173). Similarly, Catlaw (2007) has called for a better theorizing and empirical exploration of, what he called, a “politics of the subject” which “concerns the generative, situational process of subject constitution and the conduct of conduct” (p. 194). He argues, normatively, that “[g]overning must be good for those who have been reduced to nothing and ... stripped of all symbolic belonging” (p. 194) in contemporary societies. Other researchers have also called for an increased focus on studying citizen experiences of their interactions with PA practitioners to understand the impact of policy implementation on their everyday life (Jakobsen, James, Moynihan, & Nabatchi, 2016; Nisar, 2015).

More importantly, a direct engagement with citizens is also warranted for understanding and documenting their ability to frustrate, contest, or problematize—what they see as—discriminatory frontline policy implementation. Although it is true that given the overwhelming power differential between the representatives of the state and marginalized individuals, direct confrontation is seldom an option for marginalized groups. However, as McEwan (2000) notes, citizenship is also a site of “ongoing contestation” (p. 102) because everyday encounters, while often reproducing the existing state of power relations, occasionally also provide the opportunity for subversion, resistance, and contestation (Dickinson, Andrucki, Rawlins, Hale, & Cook, 2008). Therefore, it is important to document and analyze such strategies of resistance to understand their implications for frontline practice and social equity in society.

### 3 | THEORIZING RESISTANCE

The close relationship between resistance and power has been recognized since the pioneering work of Foucault (1978, 1980). Although Foucault's work on power and resistance is voluminous and complex, three broad insights can be drawn from it: First, that power should be conceptualized as a network of relations instead of being a property of an individual, discourse, or institution. So power generally exists and is exercised only in relation with someone or something. Second, resistance is always coincidental with power. In other words, resistance can best be conceptualized as an effort to reconfigure relations of power by those individuals who feel dissatisfied with the existing state of power relations. Finally, there are multiple forms of resistance—just like there are multiple forms of power—from solitary

to organized and from spontaneous to planned. Multiple researchers have theorized different forms of resistance since the work of Foucault. Among these, the concept of everyday resistance put forth by Scott (1992, 2008) is the most relevant to analyze the contestation strategies of citizens—especially marginalized social groups—in their interactions with frontline workers. Scott argues that although the dominant identities and norms hold sway for most of the time, marginalized individuals are able to eke out an existence by using atypical form of resistance “which directly opposes nothing, but ... are directed at an angle to specific exercises of power” (Butz, 2002, p. 24). Such “quiet, dispersed, disguised or otherwise seemingly invisible” (Vinthagen & Johansson, 2013, p. 4) acts of resistance devised by marginalized groups are what Scott (1992, 2008) labels as “everyday resistance” or “infrapolitics” (Vinthagen & Johansson, 2013). An important aspect of everyday resistance strategies is their “heterogenic and contingent” nature as they are dependent upon unexpected “changing contexts and situations” (Vinthagen & Johansson, 2013, p. 39). Consequently, such strategies are often aimed at short-term individual level objectives and seldom result in long-term reconfiguration of power relations. Although everyday resistance strategies might not seem heroic or emancipatory, researchers in multiple contexts (Frederick, 2017; Riessman, 2000; Wade, 1997) have found that they are “an integral part of the small arsenal of relatively powerless groups” (Scott, 2008, 34), especially in contexts where open insubordination is impossible.

Although resistance by marginalized groups is generally individual and spontaneous, it is important to keep in mind that occasionally *organized collective resistance*—such as group protests, sit-ins, and public demonstrations—does happen. This can be a result of repeated successes of individual level strategies or through a sudden mobilization of networks of marginalized individuals as a reaction to an emergent situation (Lilja, Baaz, Schulz, & Vinthagen, 2017). For example, the Stonewall riots of 1969 are an excellent example of collective resistance sparked by a triggering event. Importantly, this triggering event not only caused spontaneous riots by the marginalized gay community of Greenwich Village but also led to the emergence of collective organized resistance through the gay liberation movement.

Although most previous research focuses on every day and organized resistance (Lilja et al., 2017), there are also hybrid forms of resistance that exist depending upon the local configuration of power relations. For example, *social capital based resistance* is a meso-level hybrid form of resistance that generally depends upon the ability of individuals to tap into their social networks to contest repression. In the discussion that follows, I focus on these three “ideal types” types of resistance to understand the citizen responses during onerous citizen-state interactions.

### 4 | RESEARCH CONTEXT AND METHODOLOGY

Khawaja Sira of Pakistan are a genderqueer group with contested identities. Most Khawaja Sira are labeled as males at birth but prefer the feminine gender. However, my fieldwork suggests that individuals

who are (or think they are) impotent, intersex, or were raped or molested in childhood can also be a part of the Khawaja Sira community (Nisar, 2016). The Khawaja Sira are generally thrown out of their homes in adolescence—often after repeated physical and verbal violence by family members—because of their failure to conform to the gender and sexual norms of society. Due to familial and social biases, most Khawaja Sira are either not enrolled in schools or are forced to leave before completing their education. Consequently, a very high percentage of them is illiterate. After leaving home, they typically join the Khawaja Sira community—founded on an elaborate kinship structure—by becoming Chela (student-child) of a Guru (parent-teacher). In addition to their gender nonconformity, most Khawaja Sira are sexually interested in men. A society that mostly considers them to be men pretending to be women, their sexuality is also deemed deviant and nothing more than a version of homosexuality. Due to their social stigmatization and illiteracy, most Khawaja Sira live in extreme poverty and are forced to carve out a living through begging, dancing, and sometimes sex work. For further social and self-identity of the Khawaja Sira, please see Nisar (2016, 2017a, b).

The data for this article come from a 9-month long person-centered ethnography on the interactions between the Khawaja Sira and frontline government officers in Lahore, Pakistan. Lahore is the second most populous city of Pakistan and has been a historically important city for the Khawaja Sira. Person-centered ethnography—a constructivist interpretive research method—was chosen as the primary research method as it is the method of choice to analyze “[w]hat is the nature and location of such constructs as ‘self’, ‘identity’, ‘agency’, ‘cognition’, and the like, in different kinds communities? How are the phenomena relevant to these constructs differentially formed, stabilized, and located in the interplay between public and private spheres?” (Levy & Hollan, 2014, p. 314). Moreover, in its focus on the individual—instead of a group in traditional ethnography—as the unit of analysis, person-centered ethnography allows for a discussion of the heterogeneity and intersectionality within social groups. Further details of the philosophical foundations of my research methodology are given in Nisar (2017a, b).

Access to the Khawaja Sira community was provided by a member of their local leadership whose home served as my primary research site. In addition to direct observation, participant observation, and informal conversations, in-depth interviews with 50 Khawaja Sira at 11 research sites were conducted to understand their experience of interacting with frontline government officers. In contrast to the concept of sampling in positivist research, interpretive researchers instead focus on maximizing *exposure* by trying to interact with a comprehensive array of participants from various axes of identity. I tried to maximize exposure by talking to the Khawaja Sira having different age, education, and job status, the details of which are given in Table 1.

In addition, I also observed many interactions between the Khawaja Sira, the government officials, and the public at multiple institutional sites including urban public spaces, traffic stops, frontline offices of the government, and workplaces. Nisar (2016, 2017a) provide details about the different checks for trustworthiness used during this research. The data collected during fieldwork were coded in MAXQDA using thematic content analysis scheme (Kuckartz, 2014).

**TABLE 1** Demographic characteristics of the participants

Age	
19–30	7
31–40	9
41–50	16
50–60	12
>60	6
Education	
Illiterate	28
Religious education	1
Some schooling	15
High school	2
College	4
Housing Situation	
Rented with other Khawaja Sira	20
Rented alone	12
At Guru's home	5
Home Owner	2
With Family/Relatives	7
Temporary Jugi (tent)	3
Mosque	1

The main themes related to the Khawaja Sira's interactions with police inform the discussion in the next section.

## 5 | THE POLICE STOP

The Khawaja Sira often find themselves on the receiving end of disproportionate hyper-surveillance and moral policing by frontline workers of government. Often stopped on false pretexts by police officers, the Khawaja Sira are harassed, teased, and morally policed at such stops and often forced to pay a bribe to prevent detention by the police officers. It is important to note that this hyper-surveillance of the Khawaja Sira is not a result of antisolicitation laws. As Daum (2015) argues, it is often not the official policies that criminalize presence of transgender individuals in the public places. Instead, it is the discretionary authority of the juridical apparatus of the state intersecting with “modes of power such as capital and wealth, racial privilege, citizenship, and heteronormativity that work to criminalize the trans community via the selective application of solicitation laws” (p. 568). In other words, it is often not the law—but the discretionary authority of police officer—that determines which bodies look “reasonably suspicious” to warrant a stop by the police.

Although most police stops do not result in detention or legal charges, they often act as sites where the police offices try to humiliate the Khawaja Sira by trying to expose their true inner deviant selves. This is akin to the subjection practices noted by Daum (2015) where police officers deface transgender women by “forcibly removing their breasts and wigs in public places” (p. 566). Perhaps more important than such physical transgressions are the verbal assaults meant to de-humanize and humiliate the Khawaja Sira.

*I have had multiple encounters with the police. They misbehave a lot. They never talk in a respectable manner. First, they curse us and then ask, "Who are you? What are you doing here?"*

*I was stopped at the police security post (Nakka) for a security check. When I told them that I was employed and worked at [a government department]. They said sarcastically, "O really! So, people like you can get jobs?" I was dressed as a man [to not be spotted as a Khawaja Sira] but they still recognize us.*

In most cases, there is often not even a made up reason provided by the police for stopping the Khawaja Sira. In fact, per most research participants, many times the stop is enacted just because the police officials find the Khawaja Sira easy victims to make some easy money due to their low socioeconomic standing and social support. Due to the lack of accountability, advocacy groups, and external checks on the working of street-level police officials in Pakistan, this practice of police is often an inevitable—yet unpleasant—aspect of the lives of the Khawaja Sira.

*We were returning from a function when we were stopped by four policemen. They said, "As you can see we are four individuals. What good will 500 rupees do? At least [give us] 2000 rupees so that each of us gets at least 500 rupees...We could get rid of them only after we gave them 2000 rupees.*

*Sometimes we earn a thousand rupees [by begging] during the whole day and when it is evening, the police takes that away from us. In these circumstances, how will we be able to afford anything to eat or wear or any place to live?*

This *Jagga Tax*—a colloquial term signifying financial extortion based on threat of violence by the powerful groups in society—is a perpetual threat for the Khawaja Sira most of whom resort to begging at public places, such as major traffic signals, to make their ends meet. Sometimes, even when any money is not exchanged, the threat of detention serves as a constant reminder for the Khawaja Sira that if not now, next time the police could take their money away. This perpetual threat, perhaps more than anything, exemplifies their experience in the everyday spaces when out of nowhere, the police can simply stop and detain the Khawaja Sira.

In addition to monetary extortion and verbal humiliation, police stops also act as sites of moral policing by the police officers. As Mogul, Ritchie, and Whitlock (2011) note in their classic study of the interaction of LGBT individuals with the legal system, archetypes—such as “deceptive gender benders” and “disease spreaders”—based on dominant social constructions of marginalized individuals influence the way in which they are classified and treated by the police personnel and the legal system. In a similar vein, the social construction of the Khawaja Sira as hyper-sexual moral pollutants often acts as the presumed norm in their interactions with the police and other cisgender individuals. This archetype has developed because the Khawaja Sira are generally sexually attracted to men, and as marriage between a

Khawaja Sira and a man is illegal in Pakistan, their sexuality is disapproved by the public. Moreover, due to extreme poverty, some Khawaja Sira engage in sex work. All these factors combine to create the stereotypical image of the uninhibited hyper-sexual Khawaja Sira in Pakistani society. Consequently, at police stops, many interactions with the Khawaja Sira begin with the assumption that they are engaging in some morally polluting activity and the onus of proving that nothing “fishy” is going on often falls on the side of the Khawaja Sira.

*Even if we are going somewhere with a family member such as a brother, they [policemen] will ask us, "Who is he? What is he paying you [allegedly for sexual favors]?" They believe that sex is the only thing we do. That is completely wrong.*

*Once, I was begging at [a public road] when a motorcycle rider stopped near me. I asked him to give me something in the name of Allah. The policemen quickly approached us and asked me, "Who is he? Has he come to take you [for paid sex]? He will violate you. Do you know that?" I told them that I didn't know the rider and was simply asking for money.*

## 6 | FROM SUBMISSION TO RESISTANCE

Before discussing the different everyday resistance strategies used by the Khawaja Sira, it is important to mention that compliance—not resistance—is the norm in their interactions with police officers. Although one can romanticize the idea of resistance and “speaking truth to power” (Farmer, 2003a) and academics are perhaps guiltier of it than anyone else, the harsh reality of the lives of most marginalized individuals is that they must enact “cost reduction” strategies (Emerson, 1962) when confronted by the threat of power by the state officials. As Scott (1992) argues, “[w]ith rare, but significant, exceptions the public performance of the subordinate will, out of prudence, fear and the desire to curry favor, be shaped to appeal to the expectations of the powerful (p. 55).” That is why, various performative and verbal “gestures of submission” (Held, 1999) are often the typical response of the Khawaja Sira when they encounter frontline workers with the power to detain or arrest them. These gestures of submission, often a combination of bodily and speech acts (such as falling to the feet or imploring loudly), are quite common among the individuals of the lower socioeconomic status when confronted by those in authority in Pakistan. Consider the following statements of two of my research participants when asked about their interaction with police in everyday life:

*The police stops us at the traffic signals. I beg them and beseech them to let me go.*

*When I go to beg somewhere [and any police officers sees me], they say, 'What are you doing? Don't beg here, go there [out of our jurisdiction].' If they try to detain me, I throw myself at their feet and implore them to leave me [which usually works]. Whatever money I have on me; they take that away.*

These gestures of submission are meant to reaffirm the status and self-image of the police officials. For the Khawaja Sira, these acts as short-term rational cost strategies that minimize the cost of compliance to the “powerful other” (Emerson, 1962, p. 35), in this case the cisgender police officers.

However, the Khawaja Sira are not always passive recipients of the discriminatory practices of police officers. Instead, they have devised strategies, gestures, and practices through which they try to frustrate the normalizing discourses and practices of frontline police workers about their appearance and personality. In the discussion that follows, I use examples and narratives from my fieldwork to highlight the wide range of responses of Khawaja Sira to the disproportionate administrative hyper-surveillance faced by them.

## 6.1 | Everyday resistance

### 6.1.1 | I quickly take off my clothes

Under the perpetual threat of insults, detention, and physical violence by police officers and other cisgender individuals, one could in fact argue that any Khawaja Sira, who dares to go out in the public sphere with her atypical sartorial preferences, inflection of voice, and the feminine gait, is performing an act of resistance. Some Khawaja Sira, however, wear masculine clothing, cut their hair short, keep their head down, and walk quickly to give others little opportunity to inspect and insult them.

*To save myself from the persistent hooting, I generally wear hoodies [as they also hide my long hair], keep my head down and walk quickly so that others don't recognize me. But they often still do...*

A few Khawaja Sira, however, deploy atypical resistance strategies when stopped and confronted by the police. Body shaming is a strategy often used by frontline police officers to harass the Khawaja Sira. This strategy—that often takes the form of sexual innuendos, teasing, and physical gestures—is meant to expose the Khawaja Sira as “men pretending to be women.” To expose this underlying obsession with their body, some Khawaja Sira use it as a strategic tactic to temporarily reconfigure the local relations of power. Consider the following narratives of two of my research participants:

*Whenever the police stops me, I quickly take off my clothes [in retaliation]. Those among them who have any modesty, don't look and say “For God's sake! Don't do this. You can go. Others are shameless. It's better to not discuss this topic in detail [you will be surprised at what you hear].*

*When a police officer was threatening me and not listening to me, I said loudly, “Do what you want but if you don't listen to me, I will bring a hundred Khusras (Punjabi term for the Khawaja Sira) outside the police station tomorrow who will protest naked.” It worked and the police officer backed down.*

As Eileraas (2014) notes in the context of the Egyptian female nude blogger Elmahdy's influence in the politics and public sphere of

Egyptian protests, the appeal of such atypical protests lies in “[m]aking visible what had no business being seen” (Rainciere 1989, p. 674 as cited in Eileraas, 2014). The urban space, like most other institutionalized spaces of society, is a highly structured and regimented field of appearances where visibility, invisibility, and hyper-visibility are all meant to reproduce the existing state of power relations in society (Fraser, 1990). The nude—and deviant—body, therefore, often enacts as a sudden disturbance and occasional reconfiguration of the local relations of power by disrupting how power flows through different bodies. The Khawaja Sira by taking off their clothes defiantly in front of the police take away their most potent weapon—body shaming—and redeploy it in their own favor. This strategy that relies on the officials having some sense of decency is seldom deployed but often—not always—succeeds in temporarily shifting the relations of power in the opposite direction.

### 6.1.2 | I have a sharp tongue too

Another common strategy used by the Khawaja Sira as they try to frustrate the efforts of frontline police officials to extort money or detain them is that of public shaming by complaining and lamenting loudly. As one of them proudly proclaimed, “Let them [the police] stop me! I have a sharp tongue too (*itni lambi zumban hai meri*).” Another research participant mentioned using this strategy against frontline workers of other departments as well:

*Unlike many others, I confront them [if government officials mock us] and say you should be ashamed of yourself. The government has not hired you to laugh at us but to serve us. Some of them are better [as they change their attitude after such confrontation] but others when they hear two sentences [of protest] from our side, say four [insulting sentences] in return... If someone is without a sense of shame, what can we do?*

The Khawaja Sira also often employ sexually explicit insults in such cases if they feel disrespected in public, a linguistic strategy observed in case of the Hijras of India as well (Hall, 1997). Although employed commonly against cisgenders' indiscretions in everyday life, this strategy is generally successful against frontline workers as well. These insults and curses (sexually explicit or otherwise) are often delivered in loud voice and the Khawaja Sira also use their characteristic clap—a performative identity signature of the Khawaja Sira (Reddy, 2005)—to successfully create a scene. Through these verbal strategies, the Khawaja Sira “are able to compensate for their own lack of social prestige by assuming linguistic control of the immediate interactions, creating alternative socio-sexual spaces in a dichotomously gendered geography” (Hall, 1997, p. 452). This strategy which often, though not always, succeeds is perhaps the best example of the nature of contestation that takes place “at an angle” to official discourses yet brings immediate relief to the marginalized groups.

## 6.2 | Social capital based resistance

### 6.2.1 | If they don't listen to us, we just call her

An important consequence of the new forms of government surveillance, emergence of some non-profits as advocates of Khawaja Sira

rights, and failure of old guard of the Khawaja Sira to safeguard the new generation from the arbitrary decision making of frontline officials is the emergence of new leadership among the Khawaja Sira. Although the internal day to day social organization of the Khawaja Sira continues to be based on the old system of Guru–Chela relationship, increasingly younger Khawaja Sira are leading the charge of contesting the abysmal state of their legal and everyday citizenship. Part of the reason for the rise of these new leaders is their ability to contest the everyday disciplinary acts of the frontline workers. An example of this new vanguard of leadership is Salma<sup>1</sup> who has, over the years, cultivated relations with many influential human rights activists, social figures, and government officials in police and other government departments. Resultantly, she often helps other Khawaja Sira navigate the treacherous bureaucracy. For example, Faiza, one of Salma's Chelay, when asked about her experience with police mentioned

*We know how to deal with them. If they don't listen to us, we just call her [Salma]. She is so well connected and everyone knows her so well that no one bothers us after hearing her name. They say, "O so you are connected to [Salma]. You can go."*

These favors are, however, not limited to the Chelay. The new Khawaja Sira leadership is careful in cultivating their influence in broader Khawaja Sira community. For example, in another incident when a begging Khawaja Sira—unrelated to Salma—was stopped by police officers who were threatening to detain her, she immediately called Salma. She talked to the police officers and told them to wait for her before arresting the Khawaja Sira. However, knowing Salma's influence the police left the Khawaja Sira with a warning even before Salma had reached them.

### 6.2.2 | My relatives are in police

For the few Khawaja Sira who can tap into their familial social networks, police stops are not sites of great panic. For example, Neelo, one of my research participants, mentioned that she seldom has a problem with police because

*If I am stopped by police, I talk loudly in an arrogant manner, they become silent. They don't misbehave with me because my relatives [sister's sons] are in police. They know that if they do [misbehave], my nephews will be cross with them.*

Because she was still in touch with her sister (who had also saved her from her father's violence in her childhood), Neelo could tap into the social capital that comes with family members being in positions of power in Pakistan. The way Neelo mentioned her interactions with police, it seemed as if she wanted the police to stop her so that she could reassert her social standing.

Similarly, another research participant not only managed to get out of the Beggar's home through her connection to a local politician, she also got released all other Khawaja Sira detained at the Beggar's

home at the time. As Abu-Lughod (1990) and Riessman (2000) have noted, as marginalized individuals contest the boundaries at one node in the web of power relations in society, they reinforce other sites of existing network of power. While relying on cisgender members of the state is a resistance strategy that almost always works in Pakistan, it is important to keep in mind that both Neelo and Katrina have to rely for these subversions on their cisgender relatives who are also members of the state. This not only reinforces dependence of Khawaja Sira on the cisgendered majority but also legitimizes the same politico-administrative system they seek to subvert.

### 6.3 | Collective resistance

Although most resistance strategies operate at the individual (or small group) level because that is how the Khawaja Sira interact with frontline workers in everyday spaces, organized group protests do happen, albeit infrequently. These protests are not always successful and are not done against routine indiscretions by the state officials. Instead, they generally happen in case of triggering events, especially when the state starts encroaching on the limited conditions of living the Khawaja Sira have carved out for themselves. For example, after some Khawaja Sira were detained and manhandled by the police in 2009, the Khawaja Sira staged group protests at different places to complain against this alleged indiscretion by the police. These protests subsequently led to a Human Rights petition in the Supreme Court that resulted in a decision safeguarding the constitutional rights of the Khawaja Sira.

Similarly, in 2015 when the Khawaja Sira were increasingly being detained by police officers and social welfare department officials under the Beggar's rehabilitation program of the Social Welfare Department (SWD) of Punjab, the new leadership of the Khawaja Sira coordinated and took out a protest rally in front of the offices of the SWD in which hundreds of Khawaja Sira participated. According to Saima, who played a key part in organizing the protest, when they refused to end their protest, eventually the SWD had to send out a representative to hold talks with them who was confronted by a barrage of questions. As Saima recalled

*We asked him, 'Where are our other rights? What about our quotas in jobs [as declared by the Supreme Court of Pakistan]? What happens to the money that you take from us? ... If we don't beg what do we do?'*

Eventually, the government acceded to the demands of the Khawaja Sira, and according to the supervisor of the Beggar's Home, she was directed not to detain the Khawaja Sira on the pretext of begging anymore.

Such protests also provide Khawaja Sira the opportunity to show their large number and group solidarity. Consequently, any Khawaja Sira who does not participate in such protests is generally frowned upon by their peers. During one informal conversation, Saima made it a point to mention to her Khawaja Sira peers that because they had not participated in the protest, other Khawaja Sira would be reluctant to help them in the future. This indicates that few, organized protests are taken very seriously as an indicator of group identity within the Khawaja Sira community.

<sup>1</sup>To protect the anonymity of my research participants, pseudonyms have been used.





*this [begging] has become an unavoidable reality for us otherwise who would want to beg on purpose.*

Although it is important to critique the conduct of police officials limiting the Khawaja Sira's citizenship, perhaps it is equally important to appreciate those few who stop to understand and not judge. This discussion further highlights that if the frontline workers are willing to listen to the personal history and perspective of the marginalized individuals (McSwite, 2003), they can work with the citizens to move away from the strict compliance-disobedience binary.

It is also important to preempt an important critique of my analysis. It could be argued that I am presenting a one-sided view of citizen-state interactions as my entire narrative is based on the perspectives of the Khawaja Sira. However, as standpoint theorists in general and feminist scholars in particular have highlighted, marginalized groups enjoy an epistemic privilege in research about their life experiences (Harding, 1993; Jaggar, 1983). According to this perspective, a prerequisite for research on social inequity is that it represents the experiences of marginalized social groups as their perspectives are epistemologically superior to other individuals. Given the asymmetric practitioner centric pattern of previous research on social equity in PA, it is even more important that we focus primarily on the perspectives of marginalized groups instead of the practitioners, which is the approach adopted in this article.

## 8 | CONCLUSION

In this article, I analyzed the police-Khawaja Sira interactions in everyday public spaces of Pakistan and the contestation strategies the Khawaja Sira have devised to frustrate the police officers' efforts to discipline them. In doing so, this article makes important contributions to both research and practice on citizen-state interactions.

First, my analysis problematizes the predominantly negative construction of resistance within the PA canon. It highlights that for some sections of society resistance is not only justified but the only way to bring attention to or avoid discriminatory public policy or administration. Without studying these resistance strategies that highlight how marginalized groups are often left to fend for themselves against discriminatory administrative practices, PA as an academic discipline will not be able to play its role in imagining a different citizen-state relationship that the contemporary social movements in different parts of the world warrant. Therefore, it is time to finally bring resistance out of the shadows (Nord & Jermier, 1994) and into the spotlight in PA research.

From a practical standpoint, understanding the heterogeneity in resistance strategies of citizens in their interactions with frontline workers of different organizations also sheds light on the differences in citizen-state relationship across these organizations. For example, in the present case, when it comes to their interaction with police, most Khawaja Sira narratives present a relationship of fear and avoidance. On the other hand, when asked about their interaction with frontline workers of other government departments, the narratives of my research participants were generally less confrontational. Even though the asymmetric relations of power were still mentioned in such narratives, there was much less degree of fear because of lack of the

threat of violence or detention. Thus, the historic contingencies, path dependencies, and sociopolitical context play an important role in determining the nature of administrator-citizen interactions within various frontline organizations.

Second, this research highlights the significance of directly engaging with citizens—especially those belonging to marginalized social groups—to understand their experiences and perspectives about their interaction with police officers. In the present case, without a direct engagement with the Khawaja Sira community, it would not have been possible to document the multiple indiscretions of the police officers in their interactions with the Khawaja Sira. Hence, this research further reinforces the argument put forth by previous researchers (Catlaw, 2007; Farmer, 2003a; Jakobsen et al., 2016) about need to bring in additional citizens' perspectives in PA research.

Finally, this research adds to the limited PA research on the governance of genderqueer groups, especially within non-western developing countries. As noted by multiple researchers, research on LGBT related issues continues to remain “woefully inadequate” (Candler et al., 2009, p. 236) in PA despite the important role played by public policy and administration in the citizenship of these groups. The limited research we have on such topics is limited to western developed countries. Because developing countries, especially within non-western regions, have their distinct genealogies and contemporary modalities of the citizen-state relationship, it is critical to study interactions between the citizens and administrators in such contexts. Only by developing a context specific understanding of the citizen-state relationship and its associated social, legal, and political dynamics, we can move towards developing more comprehensive frameworks to study the citizen-state relationship. Through a theoretically informed empirical analysis of citizen-state interactions and the resistance strategies of the Khawaja Sira in Pakistan—an Islamic eastern developing country—this article makes an important contribution to limiting this gap in previous research.

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Additional Supporting Information may be found online in the supporting information tab for this article.

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