

## **Breaths of Extimacy: Rooh-Driven Ethics and Free Submission among the Sufi Practitioners of Naqshbandia Awasia in Pakistan**

Based on ethnographic research among the Sufi *silsila* (order) of Naqshbandia Awasia in Lahore Pakistan, my project focuses on their performances of zikr which infuses a recognition of a Divine Presence that becomes immanent to practitioners. It offers an invitation to rethink the question of ‘self-directed’ ethical action in Islam, where the *Rooh* (spirit) becomes the subject’s own legislator, beyond the secularizing framework of the Freudian ‘superego’ understood as an internal conscience reflecting external authorities, rules, and norms. At the behest of ‘indications’ received from their *Rooh*, practitioners make decisions like who to marry, where to work, where to move, or who to vote that have great ethical and political implications. They refer to these ‘indications’ as ineffable *kaifyat* (states) that are not given to representation, but these opaque experiences nonetheless become inscribed in the body in different ways, ranging from a ‘feeling’ of validation at the thought of an ethical judgment such as deeming a specific politician to be deceitful or embracing a marriage proposal, to embodied symptoms of headaches or nausea while partaking in certain social gatherings or contemplating an employment prospect. Based on these indications, practitioners make decisions that become the source for the moral law’s foundation when the existing symbolic law such as scripture or its institutionally authorized discourses do not explicitly serve as the guiding principle for everyday ethics.

My dissertation contends that this kind of immanent authority, where the *Rooh* becomes the subject’s own legislator, offers us a possibility to conceptualize another figure of the law in Islamic ethics where religious authority exceeds the form of external sovereignty. In my research, I contend with the following questions: When the Sufi self bears witness to the presence of its own *Rooh* which becomes the source of their ethical action, what will be the stakes for an anthropology of Islam that associates ethics of submission with certain forms of symbolic authority? What do everyday ethics look like if the *Rooh* becomes the source of self-consciousness and the law becomes inscribed on and read through the body? I argue that these indications of the *Rooh* signal the advent of an opaque Otherness that is not simply conditioned by a law that exists prior or external to them such as scripture or institutionally authorized discourses (Asad 1993, Hirschkind 2009, Mahmood 2005) but rather, is also involved in the ‘creation’ of the law, precisely because as witnesses to the presence of their ineffable *Rooh*, the existing symbolic order cannot serve as the guarantor. This latter dimension is my project’s gesture towards another figure of the law in Islam and a more radical form of freedom in submission that *Rooh*-driven Sufi ethics invite us to think about.

I have completed the drafts of the first two chapters of my dissertation, titled ‘*Psychoanalysis and Islam*’ and ‘*an Ethics of Groundless Conviction*’. This academic year, as I began analyzing my fieldwork data from 2022, I hypothesized that the recognition of the *Rooh*’s desire through the performance of zikr is tied to the emergence of conspiratorial reasoning where, behind the visible, public power, there operates another obscene, invisible, power structure akin to their own split subjectivities. In lieu of this observation, and with national elections having just taken place in February, I believe my dissertation will benefit greatly by scheduling follow up interviews from June through July in an environment that will be saturated with conspiracy theories. I also plan to meet Dr. Nauman Faizi from LUMS whose interests in the philosophy of religion through the work of Muhammad Iqbal will help me develop my own work on *Rooh*-driven ethics. As a result of this short-term grant, I hope to finalize the third chapter of my dissertation tentatively titled ‘*Conspiratorial Attitudes and the Problem of Evil in Islam*’ in the academic year 2024-2025.