

Insulting the Prophet Muhammad, Islam's most revered figure, has often garnered international headlines in the past decade. This act is specially charged in contemporary Pakistan. In the past decade, dozens of alleged Prophet-insulters have been murdered extra-judicially for their critique of Muhammad. One such high-profile case involved Salman Taseer, the then-governor of Punjab, the largest province in Pakistan. In 2011 Taseer was assassinated by his own bodyguard in broad daylight for allegedly insulting Muhammad. Numerous traditional Muslim scholars have asserted the religious validity of the bodyguard, Mumtaz Qadri's acts. Despite the riveting and sensationalized media coverage of 'radical Muslims' protesting Qadri's innocence, these vocal and influential Pakistani Muslims remain critically understudied. It is precisely this lacuna that I hope to address with a journal article on this subject.

In my proposed research I will focus on contemporary Pakistani Muslims scholars who engage with Prophetic dreams to determine criminality – a vital facet of some of these traditional scholars' views. Since Governor Taseer's murder, a group of *'ulama*, mystics and lay Muslims in Pakistan have dreamt of the Prophet Muhammad blessing Mumtaz Qadri.<sup>1</sup> These dreams are understood as proving the religious righteousness of Qadri's actions. As the anthropologist Amira Mittermaier reminds us: Such dreams matter. They present an alternative imaginary of discerning innocence and criminality. In fact, in contemporary Pakistan they can determine the difference between public understandings of guilt and innocence; the right to live or to be killed.

My proposed research – that lies at the intersection of Islamic dream interpretation and insulting Muhammad – seeks to answer this central question: How do Pakistani *'ulama*, mystics and lay Muslims draw on dreams to justify the extra-judicial killings of individuals who insult Muhammad? This question relates to two pressing concerns in contemporary Islam: 1) What is the relationship between dreams and criminality in the imaginary of Islamic legal scholars and their followers? 2) What exceptions are articulated by Pakistani *'ulama* and mystics for reacting to the egregious 'crime' of insulting Muhammad?

The aim of my research is two-fold. On the one hand, it provides us valuable insight into the complex relationship between the crime of insulting Muhammad and the Islamic dream tradition. Additionally, my focus on the significance of dreams serves as an important case study for the unsettling of Western liberal assumptions regarding rationality, logic and the centrality of the state.

It is imperative that I spend summer 2016 in Pakistan to address these pressing and timely scholarly concerns. My time overseas will afford me the opportunity to conduct interviews with the *'ulama*, mystics and lay Muslims who have dreamt of Muhammad blessing Mumtaz Qadri, Governor Taseer's murderer. I have already made ethnographic inroads in Pakistan by conversing with a number of *'ulama* who have dreamt of Mumtaz Qadri and the Prophet Muhammad. I look forward to building upon this initial work by writing a journal article that fills a vital lacuna in our understanding of Muslim scholars' views on the intersection of insulting Muhammad and dreams – an area that is currently under-studied and unaddressed in scholarly works.

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<sup>1</sup> "Mufti Hanif Qureshi Reply to Tahirul Qadri on Who is Blasphemous Part 3/4 Shababeislami 21/10/2011," *Youtube*, video uploaded by muwais01, uploaded October 21, 2011 <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BEHRD51MaDw> (accessed January 1, 2016).