

Richmond Public Interest Law Review

Volume 21
Issue 2 *Symposium Issue*


Article 3

3-20-2018

2017 Symposium Keynote Address

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Recommended Citation

Shahan Mufti, *2017 Symposium Keynote Address*, 21 RICH. PUB. INT. L. REV. 1 (2018).
Available at: <https://scholarship.richmond.edu/pilr/vol21/iss2/3>

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2017 SYMPOSIUM KEYNOTE ADDRESS

*Shahan Mufti**

* Shahan Mufti is a professor of journalism at the University of Richmond. His book, *The Faithful Scribe: A Story of Islam, Pakistan, Family, and War*, was the featured book of "One Book, One Richmond" for 2017. Mufti was a journalist before joining the University in 2012. In this minimally-edited transcript, Mufti refers to slides that accompanied his address, which can be viewed at <https://goo.gl/2oEdTk>.

INTRODUCTION

Good morning everybody, thank you for being here today. My name is Alexandra Ellmauer, and I am the Editor in Chief of the Richmond Public Interest Law Review. We are pleased to host you today to facilitate a conversation about the state of immigration in today's society. Choosing a topic for our symposium was not particularly difficult given that immigration is all over the news. Our goal for today is to bring you knowledge from professionals who have intimate, first-hand experience with issues in immigration. Throughout the symposium today, we will be live tweeting, on our twitter page, which is @UR_PILR, with the hashtag, #PILRimmigration, and we invite you to join along in that conversation.

It is now my honor to introduce our keynote speaker, Mr. Shahan Mufti. Shahan Mufti is a professor of journalism here at the University of Richmond. Before he joined the University in 2012, he worked as a full time journalist. His work has been published by *Harper's Magazine*, *Wired*, *The New York Times Magazine*, *Bloomberg Business Week*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Atlantic*, and other publications. His first book, *The Faithful Scribe: A Story of Islam, Pakistan, Family and War*, is a work of narrative non-fiction based on his years of war reporting from Pakistan. Each year, the University of Richmond sponsors a campus-wide program called "One Book, One Richmond," which is a campus-wide effort that encourages students, staff, faculty, and members of the Richmond community to read and discuss a selected book on a social justice issue. This year's "One Book, One Richmond" selection is *The Faithful Scribe*. Professor Mufti is currently developing his next book centered around the 1977 Hanafi Siege of Washington, DC, which explores the various traditions of Islam and the many communities that constitute America's Muslim population today. So now, I'm going to turn over the program to Professor Mufti.

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Thank you, Alexandra, for that very kind introduction. Detailed, I've done a lot I guess. I want to thank you all as well. I want to thank you, the Public Interest Law Review, for this invitation to speak, and I want to thank Brandon Bowers as well for guiding me through the process of putting this together. And I want to thank you all for being here this morning. As a journalist I have great respect for those involved in the legal profession of all kinds. It is, after all, your hard work in the legal profession that allows

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the news media and journalists like myself to do our job (poorly sometimes, I'm sorry), but you still make it possible. So thank you especially in these times where—the environment that we are in right now—where journalism is up for debate and its role in society. It is a really good opportunity for me to speak to you as a group as well.

I know that a lot of you are also on the front lines of the very consequential conflicts and debates and decisions being made around the issue of immigration policy today. And that is the subject of this gathering today. And I'm honored to be able to open things up this morning. In all honesty, I should state this at the outset that I have little qualification to speak on the issue of immigration with any real expertise. I myself am not an immigrant. I was born in Ohio actually—that gives me some kind of expertise on something, but not immigration. My parents, though, were both born in Pakistan, and I lived in that country as well for some part of my life. And I later did, as Alexandra was saying, begin reporting from there—from my parents' country, from Pakistan—at a time when America was deeply involved in a war in that region. And that war would eventually go on to become America's longest war ever, and as we know, that's a war that continues to this day in the region we call Afghanistan and Pakistan: Af-Pak.

The book that I wrote, that might be up on the screen now, was based on a lot of my own work as a journalist in the region and in Pakistan, and it's based on my reporting from that time. But it also, the book is also about the larger forces of history that shaped my life story and that of my family and ancestors. So I'd like to just deliver some comments today about my book, and the issues that I cover in my book, immigration being one of them, and the process of writing this book as well, and I hope uh that will provide you with some perspective, and hopefully some fodder for discussion later on in the day when more able experts on the subject of immigration take this stage.

So in the beginning of my book, I address my reader directly and I explain that I consider myself 100 percent American and 100 percent Pakistani. This is a perspective that I find many second-generation American citizens like myself feel and acquire. We often speak and read languages of our parents' countries. We are close enough in a temporal way to the land where many still have extensive family networks, so we feel an affinity for the land. I at least do feel an affinity for Pakistan. But America is often the place where people like myself also truly feel at home. It is a land open to people with many different stories. And yes, it is a country of immigrants. But Pakistan is a country that has a complex relationship with the United States. It is, to be honest, very tricky being 100 percent of both. This is a country that conjures up many notions in the American mind, not all of

them great. It is a place of death and violence and darkness and fear. I'm sorry for this image so early in the morning, but it is a place of suicide bombings and of assassinations. And this is a, this slide you see above is the aftermath of a suicide bombing in 2007 that I covered as a reporter. It took the lives of almost 150 people at a rally, including the life of the former Prime Minister of Pakistan Benazir Bhutto—some of you might recall her.

I covered many bloody scenes like this in my parents' country as an American reporter. But this is also Pakistan for me. This is the country's name written in the Nasta Liq script, which is borrowed from Arabic via Persian. To me, this is Pakistan: of mangoes in the summer, of a lush playground at home, and a game of cricket. That's what this is. And you will see, that very small person in the far end is me with a bat. That's me playing cricket with my brother, and I used to be quite good. I was—I peaked right about there, I think. This Pakistan is home for me. Being in this Pakistan puts me at ease still when I go. It is a soil where I know I could grow roots, if I choose to do so. But America is where I have chosen to grow my roots. America is my home. In fact, here's a photo of my first ever home. This was a cul-de-sac in the city of Athens, Ohio, and it was a first ever home actually that my parents bought as well in their lives, so this was their first home as well. Once again, that's me and my brother, that's my siblings, and my parents.

My father first came to the United States in 1966 as a doctoral student. This is a photo of his graduation ceremony. And if you look closely you'll see that on his right arm he wears an armband with a peace sign on it. He was after all—had come to this country and lived as a colored person in the United States in the sixties, and he had no choice but to become politically aware of his new surroundings. It would have been close to impossible for him to come to this country in this way only years earlier, definitely not decades earlier. It was only after the Immigration Act of 1956 that America finally allowed people, immigrants from places like where my father was from, from like parts of east Asia and south Asia to come to this country. Four decades earlier, in the 1920s, after the Immigration Act of 1924, that they created the Asian barred zones. So people from the east—large parts of east Asia, large parts of south Asia—were legally not allowed to immigrate, or come to these shores in the United States. So it would have been impossible for this to happen. There's a reason why my father was finally able to come at this time in the fifties and sixties, because this was the time of the Cold War. And it was a feverish race for global influence all over the world, which led America, in part, to consider allowing people from Asia to enter the United States and come the United States.

And in order to allow especially skilled and educated immigrants to come to its shores, to create an environment of goodwill in those regions, and really with the end game or with the sight on creating leverage in a war against the soviets in that region. So it would not be a stretch to say that my father's move to the United States and my life was really—he was a pawn in a global war. Just a very small pawn, but his movement to the United States was in order for America to achieve some global goal. And I find that an interesting kind of wrinkle in my life. My father eventually became a professor at Ohio University in Athens, Ohio. Like I said, I was born in a hospital near the campus grounds, and I was the first member of my family to be born in the United States, and I have always been, like I said, an American. My parents returned to Pakistan soon after, and that's an interesting story in itself, but I won't go too deep into that. But for many reasons, mostly personal, my family decided—they were one year away: they all had green cards, I had a passport, so I was okay, but they all had green cards and they were all set a year away, and my father was up for tenure at the university—but they decided—my parents had conversations that I was not a part of at that time—but they decided that they would return to Pakistan. But I did come back. I went back with them at that time, but I returned.

I went to boarding school in the United States, and then I was in—I was right here in America when the events of 9/11 occurred. I was at a college campus. I was finishing up college at the time, and I was a few hours away from “Ground Zero” when the events happened. The events of 9/11 obviously, goes without saying, affected all Americans profoundly. For Muslims in America though, the impact was also profound. Muslims in America had never been a group that was identifiable before this. Muslims had been a part of America for as long as there is recorded history of this continent by outsiders, though.

The earliest Muslims came to America as traders, long before any European travelers landed on this continent. Then Islam came to America again on slave ships of European settlers. The settlers were often driven by notions of racial and religious superiority, and so they beat Islam out of the enslaved Africans often. So while Muslims had come to the plantations in the United States, Islam never did manage to leave the plantation when it came time. In some cases though, it was driven deep underground and left its imprint on the population. But Muslims continued to come. Like I was talking about, there have been moments in American history early in the 20th century, Muslims were barred from entering the country, but Muslims continued to come the United States through all this. There were Arabs who came through the 19th century, all through the 19th century—Christians but

also Muslims. Then Muslims from European countries—eastern Europe. Eastern Europe was under the rule of the Muslim Ottoman Empire, and eastern European Muslims began to settle all over the United States, especially in the Midwest: North Dakota, Chicago, in the early 20th century, especially as the Ottoman Empire was losing its grip on that region and disintegrating. South Asians, like myself and my family, began arriving on the shores in the early 20th century. They were British subjects at that time. They had been British subjects for centuries, a couple of centuries at that time. So many of these south Asian immigrants, Muslims, were fluent in English, were passing all the literacy tests and sometimes, jumping ship.

Seamen and Bengali seamen developed thriving communities in Harlem, New York, for example, in the early 20th century, intermarrying with the African American and Puerto Rican populations and leaving their own imprints on American culture. Even molding jazz, for example. So some music historians do believe that the Coltrane refrain was in fact a law supreme and not written a law supreme. That is something that Coltrane was dabbling in at that time as well.

And then of course there's the 20th century, especially following the beginning of the Cold War and that is when my family comes here, when America began welcoming Muslims from all over the world to the United States. And this was, like I said, this was a strategy, a tactic in the Cold War. It was finally a Muslim Afghanistan that the Cold War was finally won, with the help of that mujahedeen: the wagers of jihad against the infidel communists. But now with 9/11, Americans began to talk about the Muslim minority in a way that they had never done so before. Muslims had come to the United States over a span of two centuries, more than two centuries, from every corner of the globe and settling in all parts of America. What tied this multi-ethnic, multi-lingual group spread across the whole country? Often there was very little that tied Muslim Americans. But after 9/11, all that tied Muslims together, and this was important, was that everyone else was perceiving them as a unified group. So this multi-ethnic, multi-lingual minority that had very little in common suddenly became a minority group in America.

On September 12, I realized that I was a Muslim-American as well. I was part of this group. And the way I realized this was that I received a phone call on the morning of September 12 from a federal agent from the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms. I was on a college campus, like I said, and the phone rang. It was a double ring, which we used to get when it was an off campus call, and the agent just wanted to know how I was. And I said "Well, thank you. How are you?" He asked me if I felt any danger, and I told him that I felt fine and that I only felt in danger when he started

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speaking. Those were strange days, and I did not know if it was a prank call or a real one. I still to this day do not know. All I know is that there were thousands of Americans on my college campus, but I was the only American that I knew of that received such a call. Foreign students, incidentally, did receive such calls, Muslims in particular, and I started to think about what had led this person, whether a real person or a prank call, to call me in particular. And I realized, I decided, it was my name. I was Shahan Mufti. I was a Mufti. And my last name is something that I had never thought about, to be very honest, before this, it was just a name.

This, in fact, is what I associated the name Mufti with mostly. The man in the black jacket right there is my grandfather. He, like my father, was also a teacher and in this photograph taken in the early 1920s, he's seen here with some of his students and his own teacher. He was born a British subject, and even though I never met him, I can see in his attire, his mannerisms in pictures like this, that he had absorbed some of the West. He's dressed not too differently than I am today, actually, and I did consider wearing a cap like that today. But I thought that would be confusing so I decided not to. But you can see that here is a man who is clearly stuck between Islam and the West. But the word Mufti has a very specific meaning in Islam. Mufti is a professional in Islamic Sharia court system. They are tasked with delivering fatwas. And that's a word that some of you might recognize. A fatwa is an opinion given by a scholar of Islam on a legal matter. It could be a matter of life or death or it could simply be what stock to invest in or what insurance plan to take out.

My ancestors, I deduce, at some point in history, were delivering fatwas for a living in court systems of Islamic empires that stretched all over Asia and Africa. And if you would give me a second, I would like to also introduce you to my other grandfather. This is my maternal grandfather. His name was Ghazi. His surname was Ghazi. And if any of you recognize that word, you will start to see where I'm getting. But it was sheer coincidence that the name Ghazi, surname Ghazi, also has a very strict definition and connotation in Islam. Ghazis are the judges in the Islamic court systems. And they are often entrusted historically with introducing legal bureaucracies to new lands brought under Muslim empires. So I'm quite literally the product of Islamic law. I did not really ever realize this before this.

After 9/11, the U.S. government began developing a deep interest in what we might call the Islamic world or Islamic civilization in the time. This behind me is a map of the Muslim world—the modern Muslim world, which in the darker colors on this map signify the modern nation-states that have a majority Muslim population. Some of these countries are on the current Muslim ban attempt by the Administration, and the other lighter colors

are countries with significant or some Muslim populations. To say obviously that the U.S. government was unaware of these regions earlier would be misleading, obviously. Western Africa is like I said where many of the slaves were brought to the American continent. Kunta Kinte, the main character of Alex Haley's *Roots*, was a Muslim brought to the United States from Gambia. And the darker, so south Asians, were almost absent from the American population, but now consist one of the largest race of Muslims in the country, so one of the largest ethnic groups of Muslims are from this region.

Here in America, after 9/11, they were expected to be a minority group that was from all over this world, and they were expected to speak with one voice, but spread all over the world. In this environment after 9/11, where there was a deep interest in this map, I decided to interpret that phone call on September 12 not as a threat and not as an intimidation. I decided to interpret that phone call as a plea for help. I decided to interpret that phone call from that federal agent as an opportunity, and in the most American spirit, I decided to make something of that phone call. So in the years following 9/11, decided to travel to this region of this world, which again this map shows India and Pakistan and the regions around it. The U.S. government introduced a special Fulbright grant, which was called the Fulbright Islamic Civilization Grant, and I decided to apply for that because I figured that I would have something to offer by explaining this part of the world to my fellow Americans. And then some years later I landed myself in Pakistan next door. So I was in India and then I ended up in Pakistan some years later and that where I began reporting for American newspapers as an American reporter. And here nestled between India, China, Afghanistan, and Iran, and a short distance from the Arabian Peninsula lies the country that many often describe as America's most challenging and complex foreign relationship. And it was here that I began reporting clandestine American war with Pakistan. I was, after all, 100 percent American, 100 percent Pakistani, so I figured that if anyone could make sense of this it had to be me.

The slide behind me shows the arrest—this is another event that I covered—the arrest of a man named Raymond Davis, who was a CIA contractor who shot and murdered two men in the middle of the street in my parents' city Lahore. This was in sometime after 2010. This was in broad daylight in the middle of the day in a city with the population of around New York City. A third man was also killed with the runaway car Raymond Davis tried to get away in. Davis was captured and paraded on live TV and found guilty of the murders. I don't know how many of you recall this episode. And then after all of this, while this was blowing up, through a loop-

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hole of Sharia Law Raymond Davis was allowed to pay \$2 million, over \$2 million, to the families of the murdered as blood money. And he was whisked away by the American government before the news could break. And some of these Ghazis, in the Pakistani court system, I'm sure, played some magic to make that happen. But the man returned. But amidst all this backstabbing, and shadows and knives, the war in Pakistan is always very strange, because amidst all this tension, there is also always close cooperation between the two countries.

In this slide you can see the highest ranking American military official of that time, Mike Mullan, consulting with the Pakistan's highest military official, Ashfaq Pervez Kayani. The two men in this photography seem genuinely close and deep in real conversation, and this is representative of the relationship between the two countries that I consider home as well, whenever they are not plotting against each other in the battlefield.

But I digress a little, because what I was also doing in Pakistan while I was also reporting this war between my countries, I was also on another mission, a secret mission from my editors at the newspaper. The events of 9/11, and the realizations of being Muslim American and being a Muslim had not left me. It was a moment when I acquired—when I had that identity. So I began to search for my own roots in Pakistan as well. I wanted to know the meaning of the name Mufti. This up here is how my name Mufti is written in the Naftali script. I recognized my name written like this, and interestingly it has different connotations, it brings different images to my mind. I also wanted to know what Ghazi meant, that is my maternal surname written in Naftali script. I wanted to know how I connected to Islam.

I found one clue too in this search that I would just like to share with you, then leave it at that. This was in my maternal grandfather's materials that he left after he passed away in 2006, and this was what I found in some of his belongings that were left over. It is a family tree that traces my family lineage 43 generations back. And I was surprised to see, this is a closer look at this family tree as you can see it moves through many generations, and right at the top of this family tree, my name connected to these four names listed right here. This is a family tree written in multiple languages, interestingly in Arabic, Urdu, and Persian. And the family tree specifically connected to this name right here, the name in the middle says Mohammad: the prophet of God. And the name right here says Omar and that's where my family tree was connecting through to 43 generations. Omar was the second killer of Islam. He took the reins of the very nascent nation of Islam of the empire a few years after Mohammad, the prophet of Islam, died. And right here in this family tree, which is a fascinating document. I don't know and I cannot vouch for how much of it is true, but it was an interesting moment

for me to see that actually my relationship with Islam, that I never considered actually, leads with my blood being connected, mixed in with Mohammad's inner circle at the very birth of Islam. What I found that was even more remarkable was, perhaps, was this passage at the bottom. This was a story of the family tree written very briefly by the author of the family tree, and it was an extraordinary, incredible tale of how my family's bloodlines came to be connected with that of Mohammad's. This told the story of a saintly man who is descended from Mohammad, who lived in Baghdad, Iraq, in the 14th century, and he was a citizen of Baghdad when a Mongol invader Timor, Timor Lane also known as, was in the process of creating his empire all over Asia. And this saintly descendent of Mohammad was approached by this intimidating emperor and he was told to pack up his stuff and come to Dehli with the emperor. That is where Timor, the Mongol, was going to invade next, the lands of the Indus. And he needed a saintly looking person with him for some reason, so he was told to pack up and move. And uh this saint brought his three sons with him, and each of them were appointed Ghazis of major towns along the Indus when Timor created his empire in that region, and that, I found out in brief, is how the Ghazis in my family, my ancestors, believed themselves to be directly descended from the prophet's inner circle.

The Ghazis, in other words, I found out were immigrants to the country that is Pakistan today from what is Iraq. It was an interesting realization for me that they were immigrants before in my family, but what I found a little more, even more fascinating than that perhaps, I became very curious about who wrote this family tree. It was clearly written in the 20th century, it was clearly written by a person for some reason. So I began digging and I started traveling around the country, meeting, trying to find family members who were in the family tree who might have some clue to who wrote this family tree. I eventually did find someone who had a personal diary of the author of that document, the family tree. I discovered that that man, and the author of the family tree, himself was a man born between east and west. While he was conducting this research for the family tree his oldest son in the family was serving in the British army during World War I. The man was writing this family tree connecting his bloodline to the nation Islamic, well to the birth of Islam, at a time his son was serving western civilization, and the British in their army fighting on the frontlines. This man was also a man stuck between Islam and the West. And perhaps in writing this story of his family, he was trying to find a home. Because after all, a belief that really any of us have in the end, and despite how we move around, is a story of how we got to where we got.

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To me, this movement of people—that is something my parents undertook, I undertook, my ancestors were undertaking—demonstrated to me that the movement of people around the map is something that is just driven by policy, it is not just something driven by governments today. The movement of people across lands is something that is driven by something much deeper and personal often. It is decisions made by people for their children. It is decisions made by people about what is the right thing to do. It is decisions made by people about who they feel they are and where they really belong. And sometimes it is decisions made by an invading emperor who decides to drag you along in some directions. I want to finish this with just some news, that my wife and I actually welcomed our son into the world some months ago. He's is a lovely kid. He woke me up at three in the morning today, I am not kidding you, and he took a while to get back to sleep. But anyway the point is this child, this lovely child—his grandparents, who you saw my father, his grandmother, you didn't see a photo of her but it's in the book; his other two grandparents one is a Japanese national, my wife's father, and his other grandmother is Welsh, she's British—and my son is American. He has come into this world, and he is one of the most American kids I know already even though he doesn't say much yet. But to me—I don't know what he will grow up, what direction he will grow up to be—but he is to me truly an American child and I think that, perhaps, it was that dream of having someone like this in my life that led me to grow roots in this country, because this is a place that allows something like this and celebrates it. So thank you very much, thank you.

