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Jihad or Revenge: Theorizing Radicalization in Pashtun Tribal Belt along the Border of Afghanistan

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Abstract *What this research work does is to explore the relationship between radicalization and social traditions of Badal (revenge) in the tribal area of Pakistan. What is argued is that when someone is not guilty of any crime or not involved in any unlawful acts but killed even by the most powerful like Americans, his revenge is considered to be a social obligation by his closer kin of the family. In this process, they may sometimes join organizations like Al-Qaeda or the Taliban in vengeance and often become an active member of a terrorist organization. What may be established is that it is not a religion but the social customs of that particular area that help the locals undergo an unavoidable process of radicalization. For any tribesman, fixing revenge is so important as only this way the victim can live with honor among his community.*

Key Words: Jihad, Radicalization, Pashtun, Tribal, Afghanistan

Introduction

Since the Madrid and London bombings in 2004/05, as the threat and likelihood of homegrown radicalization has increased manifold, there has been a renewed discussion on why people embrace radicalization in the policy circles in every part of the world. One of the reasons highlighted for this is that terrorist organizations such as al-Qaeda, in a digital era, are now in a better position to reach individuals in distant locations with greater ease (Fishman, 2010). Moreover, the policies pursued to counter-terrorism by those who lead the high priority war against terror have proved insufficient and, at times, faulty to neutralize the threat posed by violent radicalism and extremism (Borum, 2011). Thereafter, the term 'radicalization' has become central to research on terrorism and policy debates on counter-terrorism, especially in the western world.

Ever since the western scholars and policymakers brought forth the concept into the philosophical discussion in 2004, radicalization has been explained as a major cause of terrorism. However, as radicalization has entered into the political discussion, and a supposed relation has been established between radicalization and terrorism, at the same time, it is ironical to note that radicalization has primarily if not entirely been associated with Muslims and those who have converted into Islam in Europe (Groppi, 2017). Following the terrorist attacks in London and Madrid, the west was convinced that they had certainly a problem with radicalization. They realized that radicalization would more or less be a prominent feature of western societies, and they must be ready to respond to a new wave of jihadist terrorism.

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This research paper concentrates on the theoretical models of assumed causes of radicalization in the context of tribal areas along the borders of Afghanistan and tries to challenge the assumed correlation between Islam and radicalization.

Individual-Level Inter-Disciplinary Model of Radicalization

William (2015), in his research on radicalization, proposes an inter-disciplinary model to conceptualize more comprehensively the process of radicalization at the individual level. He applies a discursive approach that tries to assess an individual, being an inseparable part of society, within their socio-cultural environment, and analyses his life trajectories as to how they lead to extremist behavior (Costanza, 2015). The writer enumerates four cultural components to understand the process of radicalization.

To William, the *family* is the first social group that provides a child with the initial social interaction that influences a child's sense of self as he seeks to develop some type of identity. Next comes the social norms embedded in *schools and educational institutions* that leave long-term impacts on youth's development and their cognitive abilities. The *peer group* component takes into account the time he spends with his friends and young family member as young child progress into adolescence. These relationships matter because they have vital but unique influences on a young individual who is in the process of development. The last of the four cultural components is the *cultural community* which consists of religion, ethnicity and class besides versions of history and traditions (Costanza, 2015; P: 14) as an individual is embedded in a cultural community, which provides a broader understanding of rights, duties and obligations that influences one's life priorities and choices.

The proposed framework has the drawback that it takes a narrower view of the process of radicalization as it only takes into consideration the societal/cultural factors. There is no doubt that social norms and the environment one lives in carries importance in shaping and driving the choices an individual makes in his life; these are not the only factors. For example, at times, there are events that can be instrumental in bringing radical changes in one's life. Moreover, it ignores altogether the ideologically inspired radicalization that is predominant in today's world. Such a reductionist approach may not explain the process of radicalization that has a number of diverse reasons in different countries.

An Integrative Model of Conversion

Neil and Eve (2015), in their research, explain radicalization through religious conversion motifs. Their integrative model of conversion is based on religious conversion motifs, as suggested by Lofland and Skonovd in their work on religious conversion as useful factors to understand the process of radicalization. These motifs are intellectual, mystical, experimental, affectional, revivalist, and coercive. The proposed motifs are a combination of religious, personal, social and ideological elements that help in charting an individual's conversion experience.

Based on religious conversion motifs, Neil and Eve propose an integrative model of radicalization conversion. The model suggests that there are seven stages of conversion. *Context* is the first stage which represents personal, social, historical and cultural factors that help an individual to embrace radical views. The *critical incident* identified by researchers closely resembling the Crisis stage; and with the incidents encountered at this stage having the potential to lead to intentional engagement (Quest), prior to making contact with the new movement (Encounter), and interacting with this movement in a meaningful and deliberate way (Interaction). The subsequent identity construction and assimilation into the movement (Commitment) leads to the consolidation of the identity and experiences and an intention to act (Consequences) (Ferguson & Binks, 2015; P: 25). This is a systemic model that underpins a complex set of interconnected factors and conditions whose interaction results in radicalization.

Although religious conversion motifs is a useful model that helps in understanding the process of radicalization, empirical evidence suggests that its application is limited to newly religious converts who

undergo religious and ideological conversion, especially in western societies. The model is suitable for only those converts who face social extermination and discrimination in a society where an individual suffers from an identity crisis. Moreover, as the model indicates that radicalization is a lengthy process that involves the process of ideological brainwashing, it may not be true in all situations as research shows that there are members of militant organizations who even don't know about the fundamental motives and ideological trends of those organizations. This is true about those members who join such groups for some worldly benefits, social recognition and even sometimes for fun and adventures.

The Edge of Violence by Bartlett, Birdwell, and King

Bartlett, Birdwell, and King (2010), in their book *The Edge of Violence: A Radical Approach to Extremism* has made a comparative study of a number of al-Qaeda inspired terrorists and non-violent Muslim radicals in different western liberal democracies. The study characterized the radicals with strong vocal opposition to western foreign policy, restoration of the institution of the caliphate, implementation of shariah law and support for groups fighting against the allied forces in Iraq and Afghanistan. The study further reveals that the radicals were mostly university graduates and even employed who were involved in the political protest to make their voice heard (Bartlett, Birdwell, & King, 2010; P: 11).

On the other hand, the study indicated that the terrorists had a simpler conception of Islam. However, they were more expressive in their hatred of western society and culture. The radicals and terrorists had the resemblance that both faced societal exclusion, showed dissatisfaction with their countries' foreign policy, didn't repose trust in the government and were thought to be suffering from some sort of identity crisis (Bartlett et al., 2010; P: 12).

These writers draw a clear line between radicalization and terrorism. However, though not necessarily, at times, radicalization may be a necessary pathway to terrorism. In such a situation, the distinction between the two becomes blurred, and it becomes difficult to separate one stage from the other. But this book fails to address this aspect of radicalization-terrorism nexus.

The Radicalization Puzzle by Hafez and Mullins

Hafez and Mullins (2015), in their studies on radicalization, focus on homegrown Islamic radicalization in the western world. In the first instance, the writers criticize the established assumption that radicalization is a process that unfolds in an orderly incremental manner. They argue that case studies from history on radicalization don't support the kind of staged and linear progression that can be described as a process (Mccauley & Moskalenko, 2017: p. 210). The writers then distinguish between the radicalization of ideas and the radicalization of actions. The former means the justification of violence, while the latter means active involvement in terrorist activities. In the end, they propose a theoretical conception that suggests that there are four factors that come together to result in violent radicalization. These factors are personal and collective grievances, networks and interpersonal ties, political and religious ideologies, and enabling environments and support structures (Hafez & Mullins, 2017; P:961).

The Two-Pyramid Model

Clark and Sophia (2015) suggest that it is important to differentiate between radicalization to extremist opinions and radicalization to extremist actions which involves the process of engaging in active violent terrorism. The writers then go on to propose the Two-Pyramids model of radicalization. The first is an opinion pyramid. At the base of this pyramid are people who don't involve in a political cause and stay neutral. Higher in the pyramid are individuals who believe in the cause but don't support or justify violence (sympathizers). Higher further are individuals who even justify violence in defense of a cause (justifiers). At the top of the pyramid are those who take a moral obligation to resort to violence for a cause (Mccauley & Moskalenko, 2017; P: 211).

The other is the action pyramid. At the bottom of the pyramid are those who do nothing for a cause (inert). Higher in the pyramid are individuals actively involved in the legal and political process for the cause (activists); then there are those who are engaged in illegal actions for a cause (radicals). At the apex are people who are engaged in illegal actions that target even civilians (terrorists) (Mccauley & Moskalenko, 2017; P: 212). However, the writers maintain that individuals can skip levels to move up or down in the case of both pyramids.

The Social Movement Theory and Islamic Radicalization

The social movement paradigm, a theoretical foundation from which to address the discussion about Islamism and radicalization, has received wide acceptability in the academic literature on radicalization (Eitan, Chares & Lorenzo, 2015; Christine, 2013; Thomas, 2009; Philip & Stephen, 2004; Diane, 2004; Wiktorowicz, 2005). Social movements, based on a set of identical beliefs and ideals, are represented by national and trans-national organizations that try to reach out to the aspirant members globally and apply a range of different techniques, both legal and illegal, to bring the desired change. These movements exist to highlight social/communal problems, devise strategies as to how to address these problems and take responsibility for their solutions on behalf of the community that it claims to represent. To add power and capacity to the organization, new members are recruited who share identical social bonds and ideals with active members (Beck, 2008).

Social movement theory is repeatedly applied to Islamist/jihadist-inspired radicalization since the emergence of movements like Hamas in Palestine, the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, al-Qaeda in Saudi Arabia and the Taliban in Afghanistan. These scholars define Islamism, Islamophobia, Political Islam or Salafi Transnational Jihad Movement as a religiously driven totalitarian political ideology inspired by sentiments of anti-westernization and anti-democratization, and that approves subjugation of and warfare against non-Muslims until Shariah is the dominant law of the land (Borum, 2011). For that reason, militant Islamism is viewed as a global social movement that provides a possible lens to understand and conceptualize the process of religious radicalization, causing violent extremism and terrorism.

Proponents of such an approach argue that these militant organizations have been able to make a stronger appeal to individuals for recruitment with whom they share the same set of religious beliefs and understandings. This may be the reason that the ranks of al-Qaeda, ISIS and the Taliban are heavily filled by those who believe in the Wahabi-Jihadist version of Islam. Moreover, the successful framing of 'meaning' within a religious problem-solving perspective by the Salafi-Jihadist movement has further increased the chances of young Muslims to join these movements for indiscriminate violence. According to Dina (2012), the Salafi Jihadist movements have reinterpreted and redefined core religious terms and concepts such as Caliphate, Dar ul Harb and Takfir in a way to make them more compatible with their jihadist narratives.

Although Social Movement Theory is a good addition to the literature on radicalization, it is often criticized for being more conceptual than empirical. With the exception of Wiktorowicz's study on militant Islamic organization al-Muhajiroun that involves fieldwork, though his study is also criticized for small sample (Christmann, 2012), there is no other empirical work that supplements the claims made by SMT in relation to radical Islamism. The empirical findings of one single case study certainly preclude the generalization and wider applicability of this theoretical understanding.

Social Movement Theory has the drawback that it takes into account only the environmental/organizational level structural factors while analyzing the process of radicalization. However, it denies the fact that radicalization is a multi-factorial phenomenon that involves the interaction of personal motives and environmental conditions. Moreover, this theoretical conception gives a more generalized understanding of religious radicalization. Religious radicalization through the lenses of Islamism or Islamophobia is of the recent past, while Islam as a social movement is as old as fourteen hundred-odd

years. The peaceful existence of Islam through many centuries is reflective of the fact that religion alone cannot be the source of radicalization.

Humiliation-Revenge Theory of Radicalization

Radicalization literature, rooted in socio-psychological paradigm, accounts for the primacy of individual grievances and discontent by making explicit reference to the humiliation-revenge mechanism (Christmann, 2012). The Humiliation-Revenge Theory argues that humiliation of a person or group may be a source of increased anger, causing the humiliated individual a desire to revenge against the oppressors or other targets associated with the oppressor held responsible for the humiliation (Moghadam, 2006). The reason being that humiliation provokes internal pressure, either social or psychological, pushing the victims to exact revenge by switching over to the path of violent extremism against the perpetrators.

In the first instance, humiliation, which constitutes injustice, harm and loss of honor and dignity, leads to the element of grievance. Grievances suffered by someone as an individual or member of a group (religious or ethnic) can ultimately be a powerful reason to prompt radicalization (Kruglanski et al., 2014). Individual humiliation may result from the violation of fundamental rights such as loss of property, prestige and above all, the death of closed or loved ones. Group humiliation is prompted by factors such as victimization of an ethnic or religious group, discrimination and foreign occupation of territory (Kruglanski et al., 2014). Both these situations may provide a possible moral justification and strong reason to retaliate in order to restore the lost social significance and dignity.

Lindner (2007) describes how humiliation, which involves the loss of honor in many cases, escalates violence and conflicts between individuals and nations. In this regard, there is a widely shared conception that when Germany was humiliated through the Treaty of Versailles in 1919 to render it harmless, the strategy proved counter-productive. This national humiliation provided Adolf Hitler with a necessary foundation to retaliate in the Holocaust as a remedy to regain the lost national pride and honour (Lindner, 2007). What is concluded is that the expression of revenge in the wake of humiliation can result in mass violence, especially when the dignity and prestige of a martial race are hurt.

Oppression and humiliation, in many cases, is the chief reason to invoke vengeance (Torres & Bergner, 2010). For an individual, revenge is the desire to inflict harm in reciprocation against the perpetrators of damage and injustice that might have happened to oneself or one's group (Kruglanski et al., 2014). In the words of Dr. Grenshaw, 'if there is one single emotion that causes an individual to radicalize, it is the desire of vengeance. A regime itself encourages radicalization when it creates martyrs to be avenged. No doubt, anger at what is perceived as unjust persecution inspires demand for revenge' (Grenshaw, 2008). For an individual or group, revenge is vital because it helps restore the victim's lost dignity and prestige in relation to a society he lives in by dealing a blow to his enemy who is responsible for one's victimization and annihilation.

The hypothetical assumption that humiliation generates the motive for revenge, which stimulates violent radicalization, is supported by strong empirical evidences. The history of personal grievance as a reason for violent radicalization goes back to the 1800s to the Russian terrorist leader Andrei Zhelyabov, who masterminded many political assassinations in a drive to revenge the atrocities of the monarchist regime that he encountered personally (McCauley & Moskalenko, 2008). On another occasion, Chechen Black Widows are believed to be seeking revenge against the Russian troops for the death of their menfolk. Similarly, the members of Black Tigers, a suicide brigade of the Tamil Tigers in Sri Lanka, are claimed to be the survivors of Sinhalese oppression (McCauley & Moskalenko, 2008).

Existing literature reveals that acts of violence and terrorism in the guise of revenge are rarely carried out by individuals on their own. In contrast, a great majority joins mainstream terrorist organizations to vent their vengeance by resorting to suicide terrorism (Moghadam, 2006). This phenomenon has been seen in the case of Hamas in Palestine, LTTE in Sri Lanka and al-Qaeda and the Taliban in Afghanistan and Pakistan,

where there are individuals who have joined these organizations, not for ideological reasons, but under the influence of revenge (Mccauley & Moskalenko, 2008). Why is it so? In the first instance, even highly motivated individuals lack the technical knowledge, financial resources and information required to carry out a successful attack. So, it is these organizations that provide the expertise, resources and intelligence to these charged individuals (Moghadam, 2017).

Over the years, militant organizations have concentrated much of their recruitment energies in the conflict zones through propaganda campaigns. The reason being that these zones are fertile grounds for radicalization as there exist a large number of aggrieved individuals who might have suffered losses in a number of different ways in the ongoing conflict. These 'soft targets' are more readily willing to join the militant organization in revenge. In a way, they complement each other.

Is revenge-generated-radicalization rooted in society's culture, or is it the outcome of some mental and psychological condition? A substantial majority of natural and social scientists argue that the emotions of revenge are a mental disease, which is associated with post-traumatic stress symptoms. Since the last century, scholars have also floated the idea that the desire for revenge results from a mental disorder and psychological dysfunction (Mccullough, Kurzban, & Tabak, 2012). In the same stream, Malini and Nagaraja (2017) argue that revenge is indicative of cognitive dissonance that results from mental imbalance. This has led the scholars to believe that revenge motivated radicalization can be cured through psychiatric treatment in a therapeutic setting. However, what this research argues is that this hypothetical stance is more theoretical than empirical. A number of studies on radicalization and terrorism conclude that radicalized militants are mentally healthy and sound and so hardly meet the psychiatric criteria for insanity (Sparago, 2007). Moreover, it has been observed that mentally unstable individuals are hard to control and less reliable to conduct a successful attack. For that reason, terrorist organizations are less willing to recruit such individuals (Sparago, 2007).

Revenge for humiliation by an oppressor is rooted in the cultural traditions of many societies around the world since times immemorial (Malini, 2017). However, it has been observed that the tradition of revenge is much deeply entrenched in tribal societies in comparison to settled ones. The reason being that, as these societies lack much of the institutions of civil government such as police and court of laws, there is a strong need for a mechanism of revenge to regulate the behavior of tribal people so that no one may transgress the moral limits as defined by tribal codes. However, if someone is found guilty of exceeding those normative boundaries, revenge becomes due and must be exacted to correct the wrong and restore face and honor (Ahmed, 2013). As revenge is considered to be an integral part of the tribal code of life, it is recognized as not less binding than any other law of the statute book.

The inhabitants of FATA, by their very nature, are fiercely independent and can go to any extent to secure their freedom. History bears witness to the fact that these people have resisted and subverted any attempt to conquer them by mighty kingdoms as well as modern state powers (Shukla, 2015). Because those living in the tribal belt are independent-minded, even the British government interfered the least in their affairs by resorting to indirect rule. The same system of governance was inherited by the Government of Pakistan on the eve of independence in 1947. The purpose was not to govern but to manage the tribal residents (Judson, 2013).

The demographic composition of FATA is predominantly Pashtuns (Shinwari, 2010). Pashtuns, especially those living in the borderland between Pakistan and Afghanistan, have a unique social code known as Pashtunwali to organize their collective life. Pashtunwali consists of two words; Pashtun, a distinct ethnic/racial group, and Wali meaning pertaining to. Thus, collectively Pashtunwali means the Pashtuns way (Shukla, 2015). For that reason, Pashtuns observe strict adherence to the codes of Pashtunwali and hold them in high esteem. Though norms of Pashtunwali are unwritten, they are established enough to carry more authority than any other well-documented law and so provide the maximum level of law and order to regulate tribal individual and communal life.

Pashtuns have all kinds of horrible traditions and frightful revenge (Widmark, 2010). Honor and revenge are the two dominant features of Pashtunwali. Revenge, aka *Badal*, as it is locally known, signifies vendetta or, in other words, revenge killing. Revenge in tribal traditions is based on the principles of 'an eye for an eye and tooth for a tooth' (Shukla, 2015). Blood revenge is primarily concerned with honor, meaning thereby that the failure to exact revenge in reciprocation will cause one to be thought of as a coward (Feyyaz, 2017). The importance of revenge can be gauged from the fact that for an individual to exact revenge, it is morally and ethically permissible in tribal traditions to engage even in deceit and unethical practices.

For Pashtun tribesmen, the honor of oneself or tribe is of immense importance. Once someone is found guilty for its violation, revenge becomes obligated against those for humiliation (Judson, 2013). To regain the honor after being humiliated, the damage in vengeance may not be proportionate in scale and magnitude. However, it is noteworthy that the right to exact revenge in such situations may not be the discretion of individuals immediately concerned but is also retained by family, clan or tribe. Moreover, *Badal* is not limited to the prime culprit but can also be taken against his family members (Hussain, 2008). However, there is one important exception to this principle. Revenge for political killings is characterized by private revenge and thus must be exacted by the immediate individual relative concerned (Landinfo, 2011).

Modern societies believe in the principles of justice delayed is justice denied. But the tribal concept of revenge attaches little or no importance to time considerations. At times, revenge exacted after a century is considered earlier among tribal Pashtuns (Feyyaz, 2017). The blood feud would remain dormant for years unless the immediate family members of the victims are capable of taking revenge. This concept negates the very spirit of the Islamic concept of forgiving the culprit.

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