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## *Cultural Diversities: The Implications for Radicalization Theory & Practice on Pakistani College Campuses*

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### ABSTRACT

*This article was prepared for a 2018 conference convened at AIR University Islamabad on “Radicalization: Perceptions, Realities and Challenges of Campus Life”. Focussing on a conference sub-theme of “culture”, the article reviews academic literature on the topic of youth radicalization, noting where existing analyses and proposed strategies largely geared to European and American contexts are either relevant for or unsuited to Pakistani universities and colleges. In addition, the concept of “culture” is addressed, whether in terms of local customs, creative expression, or sociological affinity groups, with special attention paid to discussions of the relationship of culture to Islam. The intent is to clarify the roles and responsibilities of Pakistani campus leaders to cultivate positive spaces for student life and expression in culturally authentic ways. In fact, the potentially positive aspects of “radical” student learning and engagement in the sense of “getting to the root or source” that are part of university education need to be recognized and preserved, so that youth are empowered to effectively participate, question, and critique rather than resorting to violent options.*

**Keywords:** *Radicalization, Pakistani Universities, Campus cultures, Islam and Culture.*



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## Introduction

The terms 'radicalization' and 'deradicalization' are derived largely from sources in Europe and North America. While today the specter of terrorism and radicalism in the West is disproportionately associated with Islam and Muslims, it is acknowledged that other causes can also lead to violent attacks on civilians, for example, the rise of the far right or even radical environmentalism.

Radicalism, like extremism and even terrorism, is a contested and constructed term. This problematic has been well and ably discussed in the existing literature. The term 'radical' can have a positive or progressive connotation as well since, after all, it means going back to the source—and who gets to define what is radical? 'Extremism' similarly assumes a consensual normal or middle ground, and while most religious traditions uphold the middle way as normative—there is considerable disagreement about who gets to define what this core or middle ground is. As a concept 'radicalisation' tends to merge a number of meanings—disaffection, youth alienation, radical dissent, religious fundamentalism, propensity to violence—which ought to be kept analytically distinct."<sup>1</sup>

Literature on recruitment to extremist groups has isolated many complex factors in this process and also distinguishes between radical ideas and actions that cause harm through violent means. For example, P. R Neumann argues that there are two types of radicalization: processes resulting in 'cognitive extremism' and those resulting in 'behavioral extremism'.<sup>2</sup> Both, however, are usually summarized as what happens before the 'bomb goes off'.<sup>3</sup> There is also a large body of work discussing changes in the number and sources of such attacks over time and how factors of modernity and even post-modernity could be responsible for these changes.

Pakistan is a nation that has suffered disproportionately from terrorist and extremist attacks. Recent statistics (2016) say that about 7% of the terror attacks worldwide occurred in Pakistan, which had the fourth highest total number of incidents after Iraq, Afghanistan, and India.<sup>4</sup> One can follow increases in such attacks over time beginning from a handful in the years before 1986 to 60 in that year, such that by 2006 numbers had risen to 164, then they reached over 600 in the years after 2009, with a height of 2214 in 2013.<sup>5</sup> A further statistic cites a total of 35,000 Pakistanis killed in extremist attacks between Sept. 11, 2001 and May 2011. Factors usually associated with this rise in violent attacks include an increased presence of arms after the war in Afghanistan and Pakistan's participation in the War on Terror post 9/11.<sup>6</sup> A 2015 paper authored by Pakistani scholars found local experts ranking causes of extremist or radical attacks as follows: lack of law

enforcement, poverty, Pakistan's participation in war on terror, foreign involvement, unemployment, corruption, ethnic strife, illiteracy, and ethnic or linguistic separatism.<sup>7</sup>

While the idea that poverty on its own inspires violence and radical responses within societies has largely been debunked,<sup>8</sup> there has been in the popular imagination a sense that individuals who can be most easily recruited to violence are those who have the least to lose materially and socially, and also that lower levels of education make individuals more susceptible to indoctrination and manipulation.

In fact we need to be cautious in trying to generalize understandings of the roots of terrorism and radicalization that have cultural specificity and distinctiveness. As a non-Pakistani observer, it appears to me that recent concerns with radicalization on campuses in the Pakistani environment arise due to the prevalent perception that extremism generally emerges among the least privileged. Note that among the top causes for terrorism cited by Pakistan scholars as previously cited were: poverty, unemployment, and illiteracy. Both globally and in Pakistan, however, this has proven not to be the case.<sup>9</sup>

As for the campus component, considering the history of student political activism in Pakistan as opposed to extremism, easily demonstrates that university students can be and have been mobilized at various periods in the nation's history.<sup>10</sup> Similar to the case in other countries, there has been an ebb and flow to this phenomenon, some of it associated with interventions by the Pakistani state and some of it due to shifts in the political mood in the country. In general, we may observe that student and youth activism and protests in developing societies such as Pakistan have had a greater impact on national politics and society. Many of these same societies are experiencing a 'youth bulge' today, as opposed to aging populations in Europe and North America.

It seems that several 2017 incidents in Pakistan sparked media and public awareness of college campuses as potential sites for recruitment and radicalization and this has occasioned some soul searching as to the potential causes. The theme of this conference in terms of 'radicalization' is to consider and propose initiatives that might address these causes, especially in campus environments, and hopefully offer solutions to a perceived trend. Of course, it is probably more effective to take steps to curtail radicalization (i.e. counter-radicalization measures) in the first place, since once individuals become radicalized, the road to recovery is a long and intervention intensive one.

In this paper I will discuss some of the literature in the field of terrorism and deradicalization studies. My position as a professor of Islamic Studies in the

West, rather than a scholar of terrorism, leads me to be somewhat critical of the generalizations of Western strategies and experiences to the Pakistan case. Much of the material on terrorism/radicalization that has been produced in Europe, the United States, and Canada features theories that tend to focus on factors such as the alienation of minority [Muslim] youth populations. At the same time, keeping in mind that any act of violence is an affront to our common humanity, we must acknowledge the reality of the damage to families and societies that is being caused by youth recruited to commit acts of violence, and be willing to identify causal factors and how to address them.

The very topic of radicalization on college campuses directs our attention to the fact that radicalism is primarily associated with youthful populations. There are various explanations for this—both folk and academic. At the level of folk wisdom, youth have “less to lose” in the sense of usually not yet having the responsibilities of their own families and children to support. Also youth are perceived as being more impulsive and volatile as well as looking for some sort of overreaching cause that will draw together all the complexities of life and offer a clear and compelling solution.

At the academic level explanations of why youth become radical include observations that,

*Late adolescence and early adulthood is the time when young people solidify their political and social identities. The desire of youth to belong and be accepted also increases their vulnerability to recruitment since in order to both demonstrate and realize belonging in a group, it is important that young people conform to and act upon the values of that group. For many young people, belonging is far more important than believing. That is, they come to articulate the values of a group because they want to belong.<sup>11</sup>*

In the scholarly literature produced in the West, explanations for radicalization usually assume Muslim immigrant backgrounds for vulnerable youth, for example, the concept of “acculturation stress”. This is a construct proposed by psychologist A. Ryder<sup>12</sup> that attempts to capture what youth from Muslim immigrant backgrounds may be experiencing that would incline them to become radicalized. “This set includes all the elements related to the emotional sphere that push youth from different cultural, social and economic backgrounds towards radical forms of Islam.”<sup>13</sup> Acculturation was defined decades ago as a “phenomenon that results when groups of individuals having different cultures come into continuous first-hand contact with subsequent changes in the original culture patterns of either or both groups”.<sup>14</sup> This interaction usually generates

stress on the people involved and may lead to negative consequences.<sup>15</sup> According to this theory, such immigrant youth are said to be caught between two cultures, or culturally 'bipolar', leading to their search for some overarching cause or commitment.

Michael Hogg, another scholar of radicalization, lists certain explanatory factors that may work cross-culturally, in particular ones around what he terms 'identity uncertainty'.<sup>16</sup> Hogg argues that the quest for personal significance constitutes a major motivational force that may push individuals toward violent extremism.

Kruglanski, a psychologist who works on deradicalization, summarizes various causal factors as follows:

*Our radicalization/deradicalization model contains three crucial components: (1) the motivational component (the quest for personal significance) that defines a goal to which one may be committed, (2) the ideological component that in addition identifies the means of violence as appropriate for this goal's pursuit, and (3) the social process of networking and group dynamics through which the individual comes to share in the violence-justifying ideology and proceeds to implement it as a means of significance gain.<sup>17</sup>*

Scholars of youth radicalization in the West have further identified various "environmental factors in radicalization" i.e., reasons that youth may become politically disaffected. Among them are government policies that play a pivotal role by having a strong impact on the person's perceptions, sense of belonging, and affection towards the host country. In particular, two sets of policies seem to be very relevant, foreign policy and integration policy. Dissatisfaction with foreign policy can cause rage, anger, and frustration towards the host country and might work as a catalyst towards radicalization. The realm of integration of new immigrants may either be ignored or involve invasive scrutiny and demonization.<sup>18</sup> While such theories and explanations may potentially stigmatize Muslim youth in particular, scholars such as Arun Kundnani do not hesitate to point out that "what governments call extremism is to a large degree a product of their own wars".<sup>19</sup>

The question for us to raise here is, are any of these factors and theories relevant to the Pakistani situation? The thesis of being a member of a stigmatized minority, for example, does not seem to apply in most cases of the radicalized, nor do concepts of 'acculturation stress'. More broad and applicable to at least some features of the Pakistani experience are observations such as the following:

*Violent extremism can be best conceptualized as a kaleidoscope of complex interlocking combinations: 1) individual socio- psychological factors; 2) social factors; 3) political factors; 4) ideological and religious dimensions; 5) the role of culture and identity issues; 6) trauma and other trigger mechanisms; and three other factors that are a motor for radicalization: 7) group dynamics; 8) radicalizers/groomers; and 9) the role of social media. It is the combined interplay of economic grievances; a sense of injustice and discrimination; personal crisis and tragedies; frustration; alienation; a fascination with violence; searching for answers to the meaning of life; an identity crisis; social exclusion; alienation; marginalization; disappointment with democratic ideology or social network of power and control; a sense of loyalty and commitment; a sense of excitement and adventure; a romanticized view of ideology and cause; the possibility of heroism, personal redemption, etc.”<sup>20</sup>*

Such broad and variegated factors seem more likely to apply across cultures and situations but, unfortunately, would not give much assistance in anticipating individual cases of radicalization or a propensity to take violent action.

In a paper on youth radicalization in Pakistan authored for the US based Brookings Institute, Political Scientist Moeed Yusuf articulated some analytical factors more relevant to cases in Muslim majority societies.

*Youth radicalization is inherently tied to the issue of expectations of the young men in a population. Educational attainment presents itself as a double-edged sword. While a lack of education disqualifies youth from attaining economic mobility and is thus undesirable, a high level of education without the requisite outlet to apply skills raises expectations which, if unfulfilled for long, can create an expectation-reality disconnect. The latter is considered to be a common violence-inducing factor among youth in a society.*<sup>21</sup>

A pioneering study in the field of the radicalization of youth in Muslim societies was prepared by Egyptian sociologist Saad Eddin Ibrahim in the 1980s,<sup>22</sup> a time when Egypt had been rocked by violent attacks by factions such as the *Jamā'at al-Takfīr wa-l-Hijra*. Interviewing young members of such movements in Egyptian prisons led Ibrahim to conclude that the stress of migration from rural to urban settings and, ironically, exposure to (poorly delivered) higher education in state universities that had become much more widely available in recent decades, was a source of disorientation and search for meaning among such youth. While trained in engineering or mathematics, they

were ill equipped to deal with broader issues of interpretation and saw religion, specifically an Islamist view of political Islam that offered a blueprint for a utopian state and social order, as a panacea for the ills of their own society, while being at the same time a resolution to their personal inner turmoil and dissatisfaction. This became the paradigmatic explanation for radicalization among educated youth in Muslim societies. For example, Peter Bergen and Swati Pandey in a much later study calculated that that 70 out of the world's 79 leading Muslim terrorists (that is, 89%) were drawn from those having backgrounds in modern mixed (religious and scientific) education.<sup>23</sup> Such individuals are, in fact, the majority of graduates in most Muslim majority contexts such as Pakistan.<sup>24</sup>

### **Radicalization and Universities**

Academic literature on radicalization identifies contributing factors such as exposure to ideology, victimization, alienation, socialization, social networks, the internet, deficiencies in family bonds, trauma, relative social and economic deprivation, and 'cultures of violence'.<sup>25</sup> This broad-brush approach has encouraged governments to believe that they can pre-empt future terrorist attacks through a range of interventions in everyday life. However, as this list of possible causes indicates, the pathways of radicalization have yet to be identified, much less the correct points in which to interrupt the process. Indeed, research on radicalization processes and vulnerable populations are best summarized as 'exploratory' rather than 'explanatory'.<sup>26</sup>

As the processes involved remain undetermined, radicalization is frequently reduced to the profiling of traits or attributions of signs of radicalization in 'vulnerable' or 'at-risk' populations. In the West, these signs are typically associated with certain 'types' of Muslims – bearded men, veiled women, converts<sup>27</sup> due to an assumed conflict between 'Muslimness' and a Western identity thereby conflating Islam with 'radicalization' and 'terrorism'. Consequently concerns about 'radicalization' were extended to stigmatize a way of life rather than specific behaviors or actions, which then allowed for the securitization of ordinary and unexceptional lives, including those of students.<sup>28</sup> The irony is that attending university is normally viewed as a sign of social and economic success, yet it is also viewed as a site and trigger of radicalization for Muslims.<sup>29</sup> In a notable case from the United States, the New York Police Department surveilled Muslim Student Associations on a range of college campuses over an extended period of time including monitoring university websites from Yale; Columbia; the University of Pennsylvania; Syracuse; New York University; Clarkson University; the Newark and New Brunswick



campuses of Rutgers University; the State University of New York campuses in Buffalo, Albany, Stony Brook and Potsdam; Queens College, Baruch College, Brooklyn College and La Guardia Community College, and actual meetings and students within the city limits and in other areas of the state.<sup>30</sup> Meanwhile, in Britain, the passing of the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act in February 2015, and in particular its section on “Preventing People from Being Drawn into Terrorism” initially mandated that those working at universities should report any suspicious activity on the part of students, although this provision was ultimately criticized and revised.<sup>31</sup>

Such cases in the West highlight “the inherent tensions facing those involved in higher education internationally, who on the one hand are dedicated to promoting academic freedom, free speech, intellectual curiosity, healthy discussion and critical thinking, while at the same time preventing, restricting – and possibly reporting – extremist, radical and intolerant ideas or behavior. This difficult balance is further complicated by the fact that not all radical ideas, or even radicalization of individuals, necessarily lead to violence. Healthy academic debate and argument can often prove a powerful counter to extremist ideas.”<sup>32</sup>

### **Pakistani College Campuses**

Since this conference is directed to college campuses in Pakistan—let us now consider the Pakistani context. In the case of Pakistan, college students have often been highly involved in political and religious movements, being active and willing to mobilize. Sometimes this level of commitment led to internal tensions and even violence on campuses, in particular across left and right wing groups, or religious versus secular factions.

Writing about Pakistan student politics, Matthew Nelson noted differences across those students who pressed for the creation of an explicitly secular state (for example, the left-leaning Democratic Students Federation); and others who pressed for a modern ‘Islamic’ state (the *Islāmī Jamī‘at-e-Ṭalabā’*). Some embraced a ‘sectarian’ agenda (for example, the *Imāmia* Students Organization); and some held fast to specific ‘ethnic’ or ‘regional’ demands (the Baloch Students Organization and the Pakhtun Students Federation). In each case, however, the question was generally the same: *who defines the nation/who controls the state?*<sup>33</sup> In fact, after 1958, student politics throughout Pakistan were dominated by a bitter struggle between the left-leaning National Student Federation and Maulānā Mawdūdī’s (Islamist) *Islāmī Jamī‘at-e-Ṭalabā’*.<sup>34</sup> In 1984 Zia-ul-Haq banned student unions as a source of potential opposition and activism. They were allowed again in 1988 under a new regime. However,

violent clashes resurfaced at large public campuses such that middle class families increasingly preferred private universities for their children.

An article in *Dawn* commented on the perception among Pakistani law enforcement that universities were now sites of recruitment to extremism. "Sources privy to the findings say the study considered a sample of 500 'hardcore militants' currently in Sindh's jails. It revealed that at least 64 such militants had master's level degrees or above. As many as 70 'hardcore militants' had bachelor's degrees, while 63 had matriculate and intermediate degrees."<sup>35</sup>

Surveillance on Pakistani campuses is also nothing new. It is reported that:

*Since the launch of the government's National Action Plan to counter terrorism in December 2014, the BZU [Bahāuddīn Zakariyya] campus and its 35,000-strong student body have been under 24-hour surveillance. Intelligence agency officials have also been stationed at the university to monitor militant activities, particularly recruitment, that may be underway.*<sup>36</sup>

A further article highlights the trend to recruitment to extremist groups among educated populations and potentially on Pakistan's campuses:

*A 2013 study on the anti-India group Lashkar-e-Taibah (LeT) found that its recruits tend to be more educated than the average Pakistani. Sixty-three percent have secondary education, and some have enrolled in undergraduate degree programs.<sup>37</sup> Another study found that 17 percent of LeT militants are educated to the intermediate level or higher.<sup>38</sup> As madrassas, the traditional recruiting grounds of militant groups, come under greater government scrutiny under the National Action Plan to counter terrorism, and as urbanization drives the growth of Pakistan's middle class, university students are likely to be increasingly coveted by militant recruiters.<sup>39</sup>*

Pakistani journalist Huma Yusuf clearly expects the liberal context of private elite universities such as the Lahore University of Management Sciences to provide a more effective counter to radicalization and extremism. Yusuf further observes that public campuses can also provide positive environments in this regard, but that this depends on individual faculty and student attitudes rather than systematic planning.

*In interviews with students studying history and political science at a public university in Lahore, I found them openly debating and challenging the religious framing of the Pakistani national narrative. The main factors that influenced them were studying the politics and history of other parts of*

*the world, and a professor who engaged with them and taught them to question prevalent narratives. But students in most engineering universities and medical colleges face the same indoctrination in Pakistan's "ideology" that they did in high school. And student wings of Islamist parties—in particular the Jamāt-e-Islāmī's student wing, the Islāmī Jamī'at-e-Ṭalabā'—threaten progressive discourse on many university campuses. They aim to disrupt cultural events and prevent meaningful debate."*<sup>40</sup>

An article by Pakistan-based Madiha Afzal published by the Voice of America reached a similar conclusion that colleges where creativity, openness, and expressing counter-narratives were promoted could constitute potential sites for countering radicalization by virtue of the campus environments themselves.

*Education experts say it's important to build a counter-narrative and cultivate an environment where youth can openly engage in conversations on issues considered taboo in Pakistan. They believe outdated teaching methods, lack of development of new skills, and absence of sports and extracurricular activities lead to frustration allow youth to gravitate toward violent terrorism.*<sup>41</sup>

A prevalent perception is that, "The education system of Pakistan does not train a student in logical/scientific inference or critical thinking. So he's unable to critically dissect the indoctrinating patterns."<sup>42</sup> Faculty and educationists therefore call for changing the curriculum and mass engagement at the national level towards deradicalization. This should "involve teachers, religious scholars, mosques, state, security forces – everyone."<sup>43</sup>

### **Campuses and Cultures**

It is clear that in viewing campuses as potential sites for discouraging, rather than encouraging radicalization; cultures play a critical role. The term "culture" has many definitions and connotations, academic and popular. Most relevant for us is its most general meaning of what people, usually a particular ethnic, local, or interest group, do. In this sense we may think of the expressions "foreign cultures", "popular culture", "the dominant culture" or "youth culture". A second use of culture that developed in Europe during the 18th and early 19th centuries is more evaluative as in "high culture", or being "cultured".<sup>44</sup> Sociologists may use the term in yet a further sense of group or institutional practices and tastes as in sub-cultures, counter-cultures, and yes—campus cultures. In this respect distinctive campus cultures need to be recognized and their potentials and threats taken into account. What positive practices can be implemented in this regard?

Most educationists believe that the humanities, and yes, the social sciences, fields that offer ‘cultural experiences’ and tools for reflection and analysis should be part of every education. Here at Air University we are preaching to the choir since sponsorship of this conference comes on the part of the Humanities Department that offers relevant courses in fields such as Literature, Philosophy, Pakistan Studies, Islamiyat, Ethics, Psychology, and Sociology.<sup>45</sup>

In considering potential deradicalization measures on campus then, we must ask—which kind of campus—and clearly, it is not the campus itself that is doing the radicalizing. What is or is not available at a particular institution that might prevent or discourage radical tendencies and channel student energies in more constructive directions? So—while on campus we may reject “surveillance and curtailment of free speech and open inquiry”, we also need to take proactive measures to build on the skills and tastes of existing programs, faculty, and students.

When it comes to the topic of Islam, we find striking differences between the situation of Pakistani students and Muslim students in the West. Ideas about Islam in Pakistan are much more likely to be charged and possibly even tabooed from open discussion—either out of fear of stirring up conflict or oneself being threatened and stigmatized, especially if one is from a minority sect of Islam or a non-Muslim, or if one is a liberal or free thinker, and perhaps, depending on the campus culture, if one prefers a certain Islamic scholar or preacher to another. In an article based on interviews with Pakistani parents regarding their educational choices for their children, religion was considered of importance by a very high proportion. At the same time, presenting diverse views about religion was not considered desirable by most.

Nelson observes:

*Indeed, as my research unfolded, I quickly discovered that it was not any specific expression of religious or sectarian difference, but rather the terms of difference itself, that left my [Pakistani] respondents feeling uneasy and uncomfortable. In fact, I discovered, difference itself was the thing that most of my respondents had been taught to regard as undesirable, unacceptable and, at some level, ostensibly ‘un-Islamic’.*<sup>46</sup>

While in the West symbols of Muslim identity may in some cases lead to marginalization of Muslim youth or surveillance; in contemporary Pakistan, the exalted position of religion as part of the national narrative and identity can unfortunately lead to it becoming a source of conflict. Here we have the link to

identity—and most psychologists understand that threats to identity may destabilize individuals and provoke emotional or even violent responses.

But let's take for example, the case that campuses might attract elements that wish to recruit students to radical or extreme causes. The state, or the college administration working with the state may agree to surveillance, banning certain groups or individuals, and not allowing certain ideas to be expressed.

However, on the positive side what could be done? We note that there is another branch of literature that has to do with educational policy such as how to design and offer a curriculum that could ideally provide individuals with the intellectual resources that would preclude their becoming radicalized—i.e., that would lead them to interrogate simplistic solutions, challenge demonizing stereotypes of others, while giving them a sense of their personal and historical contexts, thereby preventing them from thinking in essentialist and totalizing ways and ultimately from responding violently.

It is difficult to imagine a single program for deradicalization on campus due to the diversity across the campus 'cultures' nationwide where such results would need to be implemented since even in a single nation or even city, class backgrounds, disciplinary focus, and elite status of educational institutions play significant roles in determining the attitudes and motivations of the youth who attend them.

British education expert Lynn Davies has worked extensively on challenges of educating for peace and tolerance in cultures where violence and civil war are endemic. She has presented and consulted widely on the international level for bodies such as UNESCO. Some of her ideas regarding the presentation of religion may be resisted in conservative contexts but let me present them here for discussion. Davies observes that:

*Extremism is founded on the notion that there is one right answer, truth or path, and that there are no alternatives. Conversely, critical education is founded on the principle of accepting multiple realities, feeling comfortable with ambiguity and searching for multiple truths, not one truth. An uncritical respect for beliefs must be superseded by a respect or disrespect for actions that are done in the name of these beliefs.<sup>47</sup>*

With that in mind, she advocates:

- 1) Intra-religious education—dialogue within a faith and between all the various sects, cults, branches, and value systems.
- 2) Critical analysis of mistakes made and human rights violations legitimized in the name of religion

3) Critical analysis of sacred texts to interrogate the more violent or misogynistic parts

Davies' framing of teaching "about" religion as part of history, psychology, sociology, and international studies and cultures reflects modern Western liberal views of the subject. This raises the question of whether in Pakistan one can design and offer a curriculum that is faithful to Islamic norms and Pakistani culture and yet values diversity of opinions, respect for individual differences, and freedom of expression. Decades ago, there was a debate among many Muslim thinkers about whether modernization (generally viewed as positive and desirable) had to inevitably bring about Westernization (viewed negatively as a corrupting influence). In many cases push back occurred against ideas or practices that were stigmatized as being Western impositions on Islamic societies. Topics such as women's rights or religious pluralism are sometimes still resisted as being imposed from outside. In the meantime certain Muslim thinkers struggle to recover elements from within Islamic tradition that support such perceptions and values, seeing this as being the most productive way forward.

Aside from resistance to liberal and pluralistic ideas among some conservative Muslim today, 'culture' itself has been contested in Islamic tradition, both in early times and today as a potential source of non-Islamic or unIslamic trends and currents. One example of this is the negative valuation of non-Islamic culture represented by the term "*Jāhiliyya*" meaning the 'Age of Ignorance'. The culture of the pre-Islamic *Jāhiliyya* Arab tribes before the coming of the revelation was considered to be rough, quarrelsome, and ignorant. In the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century the term "*Jāhiliyya*" re-emerged in the writings of Islamists such as Sayyid Qutb (d. 1966) who condemned what he perceived as a new ignorant age, defined by the West or by modernity in secular terms that were challenging and changing the face and tastes of Muslim societies and needed to be resisted by an Islamization of social and political institutions. In this model, Islam and its corresponding social and political sphere conceived of as an ideal total system or a complete way of life set off against a negative, non-Islamic alternative.

A further example of debates about culture in Islamic tradition involves cultural Islamization and the approaches of scholars and jurists adjudicating the experiences and practices of Muslims as they expanded to rule or live alongside new populations possessing their own indigenous cultures and religions. As Islamic empires stretched from Morocco to South East Asia and from Southern Europe to Africa, another dimension of the interplay of Islam and culture was embodied through the phenomenon of "cultural" Islamization—the gradual assimilation of largely non-Arab pre-Islamic cultural practices, institutions, and

tastes to be more in conformity with the teachings and practices of the Islamic religion, including the rule of Islamic law (*sharī'a*). Muslim intellectuals and legal experts from the ages of the classical Muslim empires until today—for more than a thousand years—have continued to discuss the relationship between Islam and culture.

Many Muslim thinkers, among them Shāh Walī Allāh of Delhi, an 18<sup>th</sup> century figure, have struggled with the conceptual tension between the universal claims of Islam as the final and complete revelation and the legitimacy and persistence of particular historical and cultural articulations of previous religions, including the role of pre-Islamic practices.<sup>48</sup> The Islamic theology of progressive revelation or supercessionism, placed Adam as the first Prophet to receive divine guidance. Thus symbolically or theologically we might consider that a certain recognition was given to all human cultural expressions as being potentially compatible with Islamic norms or at least neutral. In the case of perceived conflict of cultural practices with Islam, processes of deliberate distortion or misguidance on the part of leaders, historical slippage, or the deterioration of the original authentic divine guidance, were invoked as causal factors.

Islam itself was not considered immune to these processes and hence terms drawn from the earliest Muslims scriptures were applied to support corrective processes such as "*islāh*" (reform or correction), "*tajdīd*" (renewal) and "*iḥyā*" (revival). In these cases it was not "Islam" itself that was conceived of as being compromised but rather the "*dīn*", the sciences of religion, or even the *umma*, the Muslim community.

Other Muslim thinkers, particularly in the realm of legal theory, have debated the extent to which apparently sound or neutral pre-existing cultural institutions and practices should be continued or adapted within Islamic societies or in some cases imported from outside. In the realm of law, the Muslim jurists use the terms '*āda* (custom) and '*urf* (good and acknowledged practice) to indicate that culture, including non-Muslim cultural practices, could be compatible with Islamic norms, even if they were not directly mandated by its codes.

Their Qur'anic proof text for this was taken from verse 7:199:

خُذِ الْعَفْوَ وَأْمُرْ بِالْعُرْفِ وَأَعْرِضْ عَنِ الْجَاهِلِينَ

"Accept [from people] what comes naturally [for them]. Command what is customarily [good]. And turn away from the ignorant [without responding in kind]."<sup>49</sup>

Legal scholars coined the maxim that “cultural usage shall have the weight of law” and followed the principle that fair judgments must take into account the particular cultural realities under which diverse Muslims lived. The early Hanafi scholar, Abū Yūsuf (d. 798), and the Medieval Maliki jurist, *Shihāb al-Dīn al-Qarāfi* (d. 1285) are examples of legal scholars who recognized good, local, cultural norms as falling under the rubric of the *sunna*, broadening the concept from specific precedents established by the Prophet Muhammad.<sup>50</sup> These classical Islamic jurists were positive toward culture while maintaining the transcendent and shaping role accorded to religion.

A further example of debates surrounding cultural elements, involves the concept of *bid'a* and the status of cultural products and expressions such as music and popular celebrations in Muslim cultures. We find among classical Muslim thinkers attitudes that sought to more strictly delimit the bounds of the culturally acceptable. This was associated with the religious concept--“*bid'a*”. *Bid'a* connotes the idea of innovation in a negative sense, a heretical innovation in doctrine or practice, that attempts to interpolate something that is either alien or newly concocted into Islamic belief or practice. On this ground a number of cultural practices and even arts and music, totally or in part, were deemed beyond the pale of Islamic legitimacy and condemned by some scholars.

A case illustrating this tension might be the use of music by certain South Asian Sufis, the Chishtis, in their rituals. Sufism is the mystical interpretation of the Islamic religion and historically its practices and institutions were very wide spread and influential, particularly in areas of the world such as South Asia and Africa where they interfaced well with pre-existing local cultures and religious attitudes and practices. Some scholars credit Sufism with enabling the spread of Islam due to its friendliness to local languages and practices, and its colorful and embodied nature that engaged and absorbed local and folk traditions. Still many Muslim religious scholars, classically and today, condemned Sufism as unIslamic and deemed practices such as listening to devotional music to be “*bid'a*”. Recently Wahhabism, Salafism and such global puritanical trends have been particularly hostile to Sufism and to cultural artifacts and expressions generally, in some cases leading to violent attacks and bombings at Sufi shrines and other cultural sites and performances.

Such debates about the permissibility of forms and genres of music and art mark Islamic religious debates about culture from very early times until the present, indicating another aspect of how the “cultural” may be construed as variously alien, frivolous, hostile, or seductive according to certain interpretations of religion. We therefore see on going tensions between the



religious realm and the cultural one in many parts of the world, perhaps more prominently in the case of Muslims, who have been confronted not only by modernity, but by a modernity often defined in culturally alien terms.<sup>51</sup>

It is therefore understandable how signs of radicalization on Pakistani campuses may be seen in objections to performances of music or artistic exhibitions, such that certain individuals and groups try to become enforcers of strict religious norms as they understand them and may even resort to threats of violence to impose their views on others.

Most of the literature and cases of 'deradicalization' programs and strategies in Western societies or in Muslim majority settings have involved those already arrested for participation in or contemplating violent actions. Speaking of what might be considered evidence for an individual's deradicalization, Kruglanski opines:

*What does so qualify is the growing recognition that violence is either morally wrong or ineffective as a means of significance attainment or (to a lesser degree) that though it may be an appropriate for others, it is no longer so for oneself. Disengagement in the latter sense is tantamount to deradicalization and in effect constitutes the core of deradicalization. Indeed, the major thrust of the various deradicalization programs was precisely to delegitimize violence and condemn it morally.<sup>52</sup>*

This view suggests a need to take a pragmatic approach to deradicalization, in addition to changing ethical reasoning about violence. Many countries, both Western and majority Muslim, have tried to bring radicals back to the mainstream by offering religious and psychological counseling, as well as vocational training and help in finding employment.<sup>53</sup>

If we consider these strategies in terms of the context considered here—Pakistani universities—it seems that the one priority should be analyzing any deficiencies in student services, specifically those offering social and psychological support. In terms of challenging violence as a solution that is religiously legitimated, one must consider enhancing the quality of areas of campus life where religious norms and teachings are available to students. In many cases Religious Studies or the academic study of Islam may not be considered as a academic subject, leaving many students with only exposure to simplistic ideas and interpretations about religion, especially Islam, Muslim history and civilization. It is as if ideas connected with Islam for many are kept at the level of childhood beliefs and forms of reasoning, such that matters of faith and ethical thinking using Islamic tools and norms are relegated to blindly

following whichever charismatic preacher is in fashion, or to engaging in a rote memorization of the terminology of *fiqh* or *ḥadīth* studies.

The task of university humanities and social science programs is thus in some cases remedial, in countering inadequate formation, both in religion and in critical thinking, at primary and secondary levels, but also these subjects need to be integrated within the broader curriculum of study so that all students, not only those majoring in such fields, can benefit from and be empowered by deeper and broader understandings of world history and the human condition, including their own social and history location.

In an essay written almost a generation ago, Western Muslim scholar ‘Abdul Hakim Murad looks forward to challenges facing Muslim in the ‘new millennium’<sup>54</sup> In it he decried global trends among Muslims towards favoring totalitarian trends, deeming Muslims holding divergent views as bound for Hell thereby exhibiting a mentality close to Kharijite ‘*takfīr*’.

This therefore occasions the need to retreat and disown society - the idea of *Takfīr wa’l-Hijra* that informed Shukrī Muṣṭafā’s group in late 1970s Egypt. In secretive inner circles, the saved elect gather to plan military-style actions against the system. They are indifferent to the sufferings of civilians—for they are apostates and deserve death anyway. Such attacks will prefigure, in some rather vague and optimistic fashion, the coming to power of the true believers, and the suppression of all other interpretations of religion.

*This idea of takfīr wa’l-hijra is thus, in structural terms, a global phenomenon. Its members are usually educated, almost always having science rather than arts backgrounds. Technology is not disowned, but sedulously cultivated. Bomb-making becomes a disciplined form of worship. I believe that this tendency, which has been fostered rather than eliminated by the repressiveness of the regimes, will grow in relative significance as we traverse the end of the century. It will continue to besmirch the name of Islam, by shooting tourists, or blowing up minor targets in pinprick attacks that strengthen rather than weaken the regimes. It will divide the Islamic movement, perhaps fatally. And it will provide the regimes with an excuse further to repress and marginalise religion in society.<sup>55</sup>*

These observations by Murad remain relevant and are pertinent to our concerns with university cultures that might fail to disabuse students of neo-Kharijite thinking. We can see a confluence of cultural, identity, psycho-social, and religious frameworks that need to be analyzed and addressed to counter perceptions among educated youth that could lead to a valorization of violence in the name of

Islam and an acceptance of the demonization of others in the society.

Also salient for a university milieu is Murad's assessment that these challenges in Muslim societies can best be met through "the cultivation of an informed leadership." Unfortunately, as Murad opines:

*Most Muslim leaders cannot provide the intellectual guidance needed to help intelligent young people deal with the challenges of today. Ask the average Muslim activist how to prove a post-modernist wrong, and he will not be able to help you very much. Our heads are buried in the ground. However, it is not only intellectual trends which we ignore. The environment, too, is an impending catastrophe which has not grabbed our attention at all. Perhaps our activists will still be choking out their rival rhetoric on the correct way to hold the hands during the Prayer, while they breath in the last mouthful of oxygen available in their countries. They seem wholly oblivious to the problem.<sup>56</sup>*

Murad's thesis that, "Institutions, therefore, urgently need to be established, to train young men and women both in traditional *sharī'a* disciplines, and in the cultural and intellectual language of today's world", should remind this audience of numerous projects in the not so distant past and present—for example, Sir Sayyid Ahmed Khan's vision for Aligarh University, Muhammad Iqbal's project of the "reconstruction of religious thought in Islam", as well as contemporary experiments with forms of 'enlightened moderation'.

For Pakistani colleges and universities to take up this mantle and assume leadership roles in creating communities and environments where students can flourish, both intellectually and in terms of character building and personal well-being, will take sustained and well-researched efforts on the part of administrators, faculty, students and all stake holders in the success of these educational institutions and the future of the nation. But it cannot be expected that faculty and upper administrators have the skill sets on their own to promote healthy campus cultures. Robust and well-trained units of student services and affairs need to be provided, as do counseling service units, including something akin to the 'Muslim chaplain' role emerging in Western university settings. Such roles have developed since having religious knowledge alone does not guarantee that an individual religious teacher or scholar will have the requisite insights into human psychology and the skills in interpersonal relations involved in mentoring youth and other community members.

Perhaps that is why Western based Muslim scholars like Murad have spent so much effort studying and translating the works of figures such as al-Ghazālī in the spirit that Muslims need to recover and internalize their own resources for '*adab*', not merely in the sense of literary and cultural appreciation and competency, but also for inculcating and inspiring behavioral beauty along the lines of '*ihsān*', mercy and compassion, and constructive, rather than destructive, activism and criticism.

The final element suggested by this review of existing measures to deradicalize involves what comes after university study—are there meaningful job opportunities, and for this audience, what role do universities play in facilitating the employment for their graduates, leaving aside the role of the state and society as a whole in this regard?

Providing resources is going to be challenging for the nation’s universities and for policy makers at all levels, including the Higher Learning Commission. Is there a broad and sustained consensus, together with adequate resources at the provincial and national levels to make the requisite changes? Can universities remediate on their campuses, negative results arising from deficiencies of the educational system at earlier levels? This is a time to take stock of the false steps of the past and see what can be achieved going forward.<sup>57</sup>

University educators and administrators must realize the tension between the role of the university in cultivating the potential of the ‘radical’ in youth rather than crushing or extinguishing it. The radical search for truth may challenge frameworks of established knowledge that may blind us to our own complacency and intellectual arrogance or laziness. In English—being a ‘radical’ may also have the positive connotation of striving to get to the root, essence, or truth of things. In Urdu, the term ‘radical’ may be translated by “*intihāpasand*” —which is more like “extremist” or “*bunyādpāras*” which conveys the idea of being too devoted to or absorbed in claiming access to the foundation to the extent of “worshipping” it. The term “*usūlī*”, however, captures some of the positive connotations of the radical in aiming to get to the source, or even of being principled. Pakistan’s universities, when both principled and committed to the search for truth, should strive to unfetter the intellectual and social abilities of their students while empowering them to intellectually and morally reject the dead end of violent extremism.



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