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DURHAM MIDDLE EAST PAPERS

INSTITUTE FOR MIDDLE EASTERN AND ISLAMIC STUDIES
ANNUAL CONFERENCE: 'DIVERSITY'

edited by Juline Beaujouan-Marliere
Durham Middle East Paper No. 95

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STUDIES ANNUAL CONFERENCE: 'DIVERSITY'

edited by Juline Beaujouan-Marliere

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INTRODUCTION --- by *Juline Beaujouan-Marliere*

I am delighted to introduce this special issue of the Durham Middle East Papers with papers presented at the Institute for Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies (IMEIS) Annual Postgraduate Conference, held at Durham Castle on September 20th, 2017.

The IMEIS is a Social Science-focused academic institute of excellence within the School of Government & International Affairs of Durham University. It is a research-led in ethos, with a track-record of internationally acclaimed

research outputs across all sub-areas of its activity. The interdisciplinary nature of the Institute's activities and the interaction of political economists, political scientists, historians and Islamicists - as well as with colleagues from Anthropology, Arabic, Archaeology, Geography, Business – mark its success through collective focus on the study of the Middle East and the Muslim world in the widest sense.

For its 2017 Annual Conference, the IMEIS has gathered young researchers

around the theme of 'Diversity'. Throughout time, the Muslim world has been diverse ethnically, linguistically, culturally and religiously. Nonetheless, it is still subject to debate whether such diversity has been a weakening factor or the reason for Muslim World long-lasting history. Moreover, grasping the entirety of this multifaceted nature exceeds by far the boundaries of academic disciplines. Thus, the IMEIS suggested exploring diversity not only as a topic but also as an approach to Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies, and as a methodology to carry out research across and between multiplicities of fields.

The IMEIS 2017 Annual Conference welcomed nine speakers who represented several institutions across the Australia, Italy, Pakistan, and the United Kingdom. The subjects covered from the definition of 'moderate' Islam, Islamic feminism, the interpretation of the Mahdi state, the life of Palestinian traveller Ya'qub ash-Shelabi, the role of the Alawites in the Syrian civil war, the state of Kurdish literature, and the discourse surrounding the January 2011 revolution in Egypt.

This special issue of the Durham Middle East Papers has been sought as a glance at the IMEIS Annual Conference. It features the Opening Remarks by keynote speaker Dr Ipek Demir from Leicester University about the issue of diversity concerning knowledge production and decoloniality of this knowledge. This was followed by Matthew Hedges's study of the role of the Circassian and Chechen minorities in the security regime of King Hussein of Jordan. Finally, Umair Jamal explored how Pakistan's 'Blasphemy law' undermines the countries' religious diversity. I hope the readers of this special issue find it informative and enjoyable read and foster their interest in the Islamic World and in the activities of the IMEIS.

Finally, I wish to thank all speakers and participants at the IMEIS Annual Conference 2017 for their engagement and enthusiasm. A special thanks goes to the authors for their contributions to this special issue. I also would like to express my sincere gratitude to the Durham Middle East Papers publishing board, especially to Anoush Ehteshami, Clive Jones and Carly Beckerman, for the time and effort in ensuring the quality of this issue.

**“THROUGHOUT
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RESEARCHING THE MIDDLE EAST: DIVERSITY OR DECOLONIALITY?

Ipek Demir

Dr Ipek Demir is Associate Professor of Sociology, University of Leicester. Her work sits at the intersections of the fields of diaspora studies, ethno-politics, race and identity, nationalism, indigeneity, global politics as well as social and critical thought and interdisciplinarity. She has also carried out empirical research on Kurdish and Turkish diasporas, funded by an AHRC fellowship.

She is the founder and co-coordinator of the British Sociological Association's Diaspora, Migration and Transnationalism Study Group and the former Vice-Chair of European Sociological Association's Migration Research Network. Before joining Leicester she was an ESRC research fellow at the University of Cambridge, and also taught sociology and politics at the Open University, the Universities of Sussex and Cambridge. id34@leicester.ac.uk

Those opening remarks focus on diversity with regard to knowledge production, especially in relation to Eurocentricism and the associated arguments about decoloniality in knowledge production.¹

Eurocentricism in knowledge production arises from history. The modern world is largely shaped by European colonialism and empires. Modern education systems, the curriculum, and the disciplines have canons which are shaped by this particular history. Colonialism had at its core a set of political, economic and sociocultural hierarchies.

It also constructed intellectual hierarchies which were significant in justifying slavery, appropriation and exploitation. Such racial hierarchies formed through colonialism and empires are still reproduced in how we see and approach the world, how we construct or ignore the thought systems of others, including in the field of Middle East Studies. There are erasures, epistemic violence and also an unwritten 'ignorance contract' shaping what we know, how we know, and what we do not know. The field of the Global South has aimed to challenge this, and has sought to shift the way we discuss and theorize modernity, globalization, and social justice. It draws from a variety of sources and approaches, for example critical race theory, transnational feminism, postcolonialism and decoloniality. Within this field, the epistemological interventions

of, for example, Mignolo² and Boaventura de Sousa³ have revealed the epistemic violence on others, Shilliam⁴ has examined anticolonial struggles, whilst Bhambra⁵ and Chakrabarty⁶ have criticized the inadequate understandings of European history and how it impacts our understanding of today. The focus has been on the gendered, racialized, socio-economic and epistemological inequalities. Below, I discuss why we need decoloniality of knowledge production in general, and decoloniality in the Middle East scholarship in particular. This is because '[w]e are at a point in our work when we can no longer ignore the empires and the imperial context in our studies'.⁷

Decoloniality is primarily an intervention in epistemology. It questions the one-sided and partial view of the world, deems it inadequate in its understanding of history and of today. In an attempt to undo these, there is also a growing movement seeking to decolonize the curricula and canons in disciplines across the social sciences and humanities, for example in disciplines such as history, international relations, sociology, literature and social work. Comprised of students, academics and activists, its proponents argue that through a narrow focus on European authors, histories and perspectives, existing canons and curricula reproduce a world-view where Europeans and whiteness are seen not only as morally but also as intellectually

“...THERE HAVE BEEN MAJOR TRANSFORMATIONS OF THE CURRICULA IN THE LIGHT OF FEMINIST CRITIQUE...”

superior. The lack of a critical perspective not only shapes what white Europeans learn and think, but also produces a 'white gaze'⁸ which comes to shape how people of colour think about themselves and history and vis-à-vis others. Any serious understanding of history, politics and arts and culture today has to unpack and circumvent the reproduction of such inherited prejudices and hierarchies. This is what the current decolonization struggle is about, and if it has not arrived at your university or discipline yet, be prepared, it is around the corner.

Scholars who demand this are at times approached with suspicion, belittled for having an axe to grind. Universities, and the disciplines and knowledges created therein are seen as somewhat different to other institutions. Academia is treated as an exception in that the best materials, books and ideas are apparently taught by the best and brightest. Similar arguments were of course offered in the 1960s and 1970s when academia was confronted by feminist critique. Decades later, there have been major transformations of the curricula in the light of feminist critique – albeit this is far from complete nor is it at a desirable level. Disciplines in humanities and social sciences have had to pay increasing attention to gender, not just in terms of subject matter but also in terms of epistemological

tools and stances shifting how we understand and explain the world.⁹ Having gone through that in terms of gender, it is interesting to note the ensuing resistance to the demand to decolonize. It is telling that the simple demand for enrichment and for accuracy are at times met with hostility and resistance within and outside of academia.¹⁰

As with gender, it is of utmost importance, in my view, that we do not demand decolonization so that we can provide a 'diverse' curriculum. We must demand it so that the curriculum is true to history and our present; one which takes us away from one-sided and inadequate accounts. Hence it is not plurality of knowledges but injustice to knowledge (through convenient omissions) which should be the driver, the impetus here. We must challenge epistemological biases and ignorance, not create a parallel canon. Our focus should be on oppression and injustice not the celebration of difference. We should, I argue, demand epistemic justice, not diversity managerialism for the curriculum.

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Here I would like to consider two approaches which were presented, amongst others, as alternative perspectives to Eurocentricism: multiple modernities, and cosmopolitanism. These two approaches have been extremely influential in amongst the disciplines which feed the Middle East Studies scholarship, especially disciplines such as international relations, politics, sociology and history. In the rest of this paper I would like to discuss the limitations of both the multiple modernities paradigm and the cosmopolitanism scholarship and argue that neither have the potential to take the rest of the world into consideration in a way which would move us from Eurocentricism to decoloniality.

From 1990s onwards, the multiple modernities approach began to challenge the 'one modernity' thinking which dominated the modernization theory of the previous decades. It was argued that scholars should not look at the rest of the world from Europe, but instead accept different trajectories

and modernities, diversifying and multiplying our understanding of modernity and progress. European/Western modernity was presented as one model among many other possible different routes, for example different to the ones Turkey, Russia or China followed¹¹¹². The multiple modernities paradigm, however did not do away with Eurocentricism. In fact, as has been challenged by Bhambra¹⁵, the literature on multiple modernities in fact does not address the problematic constructions of modernity or the way in which such reconstructions are continuing to have consequences for our understanding of the present. It fails to see modernity as product of complex engagements between different parts of the world, including Europe and elsewhere, and thus as a collective good, belonging to humanity. The literature on multiple modernities sees the rest of the world as external to the 'Miracle that is Europe'. As a consequence, when it examines the Middle East, it does not show enough awareness of colonial roots and context nor reflect adequately on colonization and its consequences on what followed in the Middle East and in Europe. In a typical fashion to International Relations scholarship, it considers Europe and the Middle East separately, not interconnectedly.¹⁴ It leaves the dominant way in which Europe is understood as sacrosanct and untouched, and thus produces a problematic construction of the Middle East, be it Turkey or Iran. In summary, it neither acknowledges the legacies of colonialism, nor the

contributions of 'others' to modernity and to Europe. Europe and the Middle East are left to live in different worlds. Within such a Eurocentric context, for example, it is no wonder that the 2011 Arab uprisings were wrongly constructed as mainly an uprising against the autocratic and 'failed' regimes in those countries. The narrative that the protesters were contesting the global order and also the West was not recognized or effectively reported.¹⁵

The second influential approach I would like to consider is cosmopolitanism. Cosmopolitanism is typically conceived as a normative stance against nationalism. It demands the expansion of the sphere of identification and belonging beyond national boundaries.

Cosmopolitanism, through the challenge it brought to nationalism and state-centric discourses dominant in political science, international relations and sociology, could perhaps lead the path out of Eurocentricism? Scholars of cosmopolitanism have been successful in terms of providing a normative criticism of nationalism, and also of naïve universalism, something welcome in Middle East Studies. The antagonism which some scholars of cosmopolitanism adopt towards multiculturalism, however, is telling. In fact, multiculturalism is used as a foil against cosmopolitanism by some of the leading cosmopolitanism scholars.¹⁶ For example:

‘Multiculturalism means plural monoculturalism. It refers to collective categories of difference and has a tendency to essentialize them... multiculturalism perceives cultural differences as -so to speak- “little nations” in one nation’.¹⁷

‘cosmopolitanism is not a generalized version of multiculturalism where plurality is simply the goal’¹⁸; ‘[m]ulticulturalism, too, often results in an increase in cultural differences as opposed to being a means to secure autonomy and justice’.¹⁹

‘ours is an effort to move beyond multiculturalism’, and to go beyond the ‘ultimately essentializing nature of culturally and ethno-religious-based paradigms’.²⁰

If non-hierarchical acceptance of, and engagement with, others is central to cosmopolitanism, such caricatured criticisms of multiculturalism are difficult to follow, if not rather uncomfortable. The adversary of multiculturalism is monoculturalism and assimilation; it is not cosmopolitanism. Multiculturalism, in its aspiration to allow minoritized groups to participate as equals in civic and political life, and to enhance their claim-making capacities within nation-states is essential for a cosmopolitan order as it also disrupts nationalism and naïve national narratives. After all, multiculturalism was never purely about diversity and difference; it was

about questioning the upper hand that the hegemonic national subjects held, allowing minoritized groups to make claims and participate on an equal footing as civic and political citizens. Multiculturalist demands of protection from racism and rejection of assimilation support, if not overlap with, cosmopolitan aspirations. A cosmopolitanism which is too quick to engage in swift dismissal of multiculturalism, and one which does not effectively recognize multiculturalism’s historical struggles against the assimilationist policies of the old order, including its alliance with anti-racist movements in Europe and North America, could not be an ally of decolonialism. Nor can it purport to be anti-Eurocentric if there is curiously little said in the work of scholars of cosmopolitanism about cultural plurality being woven into the fabric of European history and society due to colonialism and empire.

In summary, the multiple modernities paradigm and also some of the cosmopolitanism perspectives, dominant in fields of, for example, history, sociology, politics and international relations, have failed to move us away from Eurocentricism or towards decoloniality. Lessons can be learnt here about how not to deploy diversity in the field of Middle East Studies. In our attempts to decolonize, we have to ensure that by paying attention to non-western perspectives, scholars, the Global South and the periphery the

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field of Middle East Studies does not end up running parallel stories to those told at the core of the field. Instead we need to question, and shift problematic categories and understandings of the world. We need to shift the canon to more adequate accounts rather than create yet another form of peripheralization.²¹

Last but not least, I would like to end by highlighting that in an increasingly globalized and interconnected world, the issue of diversity and the battle of epistemology will not go away anywhere soon. In fact, we are probably going to see an ever-increasing friction between those who accept diversity and the obligations which arise from that (for example, the loss of privilege) and those who resent and resist this loss, lost in their failure to understand that cultural plurality is woven into European history and today. The questioning of privilege in epistemology needs to be conducted through a defence of accuracy and adequacy, not through a defence of multiplicity and diversity. The convenient exclusions are not only unjust to those whom the canon excludes, but also frustrating for those who hold the upper hand as it leaves them with an inadequate and inaccurate vision of history and of today, unable to deal with the complexity and diversity in which we find ourselves.

END NOTES

- ¹ This paper follows from the opening keynote I gave at the Institute for Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies (IMEIS) Conference at Durham Castle, University of Durham, on 19 September 2017. I would like to thank the audience and the organizers for the opportunity for intellectual exchange and discussion.
- ² W. D. Mignolo, 'Epistemic Disobedience, Independent Thought and Decolonial Freedom', *Theory, Culture & Society*, 26:7-8 (2009), 159-181.; W. D. Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity: Global Futures, Decolonial Options* (Latin America Otherwise). Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011.
- ³ S. Boaventura de Sousa, *Epistemologies of the South*. Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers, 2014.
- ⁴ R. Shilliam, *International Relations and Non-Western Thought: Imperialism, Colonialism and Investigations of Global Modernity*, London: Routledge, 2010.
- ⁵ G. K. Bhabra, *Rethinking Modernity: Postcolonialism and the Sociological Imagination*, New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007.; G. K. Bhabra, *Connected Sociologies*, London: Bloomsbury, 2014.
- ⁶ D. Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000.
- ⁷ E. W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, London: Vintage, 1994. 5.
- ⁸ Similar to 'male gaze' where male perspectives and patriarchy are adopted by women.
- ⁹ e.g. L. Alcoff, *Feminist Epistemologies*, London: Routledge, 1993.
- ¹⁰ See for instance the recent debate surrounding the demand to decolonize the curriculum at the University of Cambridge: http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/entry/telegraph-lola-olufemi_uk_59f1fe0fe4b077d8dfc7eaf9; <https://www.varsity.co.uk/news/13893>.
- ¹¹ S. N. Eisenstadt, *Multiple Modernities*, *Daedalus*, 129:1 (2000), 1-29.
- ¹² P. Wagner, *Modernity: Understanding the Present*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2012.
- ¹³ G. K. Bhabra, *Rethinking Modernity: Postcolonialism and the Sociological Imagination*, New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007.
- ¹⁴ For a criticism see B. Gruffydd Jones, 'International Relations, Eurocentrism

and Imperialism' in *Decolonizing International Relations*, edited by B. Gruffydd Jones. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield. 1-19.; R. Shilliam, *International Relations and Non-Western Thought: Imperialism, Colonialism and Investigations of Global Modernity*, London: Routledge, 2010.

- ¹⁵ O. Goksel, 'Eurocentrism Awakened: The Arab Uprisings and the Search for a "Modern" Middle East' in *Turkey's Relations with the Middle East: Political Encounters after the Arab Spring* edited by H. Isikal and O. Goskel. New York and Heidelberg: Springer, 2017. 33-51.
- ¹⁶ The backlash against multiculturalism in wider political debates and European public policy and discourse is also worth noting. It could also be captured in the Brexit debate. When surveyed, 80% of those who voted Brexit said they saw immigration as a social ill. However multiculturalism topped their 'dislikes' list, with 81% of them seeing multiculturalism as a social ill. See <http://lordashcroftpolls.com/2016/06/how-the-united-kingdom-voted-and-why/>.
- ¹⁷ U. Beck, 'Multiculturalism or Cosmopolitanism: How Can We Describe and Understand the Diversity of the World?', *Social Sciences in China*, 32:4 (2011). 54.
- ¹⁸ G. Delanty, 'The cosmopolitan imagination : critical cosmopolitanism and social theory', *The British Journal of Sociology*, 57:1 (2006). 35.
- ¹⁹ G. Delanty, 'Cultural diversity, democracy and the prospects of cosmopolitanism: a theory of cultural encounters', *British Journal of Sociology*, 62:4 (2011). 650.
- ²⁰ N. Glick Schiller; T. Darieva and S. Gruner-Domic, 'Defining cosmopolitan sociability in a transnational age. An introduction', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 34:3 (2011). 401.
- ²¹ In my own area of specialism (Kurds, Turkey and Kurdish diaspora), for example, I have resisted creating an alternative story of Turkey, an indigenous perspective, some sort of a parallel universe. My aim has been to unsettle Turkish modernity's self-image (the story it tells itself) and to enable the rethinking, reconstruction and retelling of the story of modernity in Turkey which pierces homogeneity claims but is also confident enough to carry the perspectives of those whom it erased or attempted to silence (Demir, 2014). I move from a mere focus on identity claims to a focus on oppression and injustice. In a similar vein, my most recent work, I tilt the axis of the Global South scholarship towards the Middle East and the Kurds, and discuss the epistemic interventions they make, the way in which they expose links between their predicament and Europe, and highlight how they advance a transnational indigenous movement (Demir, forthcoming 2018).

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THE ROLE OF MINORITIES IN REGIME SECURITY; CASE STUDY OF THE CIRCASSIANS AND CHECHENS IN KING HUSSEIN'S JORDAN

Matthew Hedges

Matthew Hedges is a PhD student at Durham University, an advisor at Gulf States Analytics, and an intelligence analyst at a cyber-intelligence firm in the UK. Matthew's research at Durham focuses on the evolution of national security debates within the GCC. He is a regular commentator and contributor to Defense News, Gulf States Newsletter (GSN), International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), Military Balance, Defence Procurement International, and the Royal United Services Institute (RUSI).

Matthew's last published article was titled The GCC and the Muslim Brotherhood: What Does the Future Hold? and was published in Middle East Policy in March 2017. He received his M.A. in International Relations from the University of Exeter and has worked across the Middle East, predominantly in the field of public sector consulting. Matthew.j.hedges@durham.ac.uk

'Of all the ethnic minorities in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan none occupies a higher position of social importance nor wields such tremendous political and economic power than does a related group of peoples known in English as Circassians and in Arabic as Sharakisah'¹

A prominent feature of Middle Eastern-focused regime security strategies is the exploitation and utilisation of minority groups. While in homogenous societies this strategy can stress social ties, in heterogeneous societies the division between the minority group, society, and the regime, can represent substantial benefits. Prominent contemporary examples of this strategy include the Assad regime's long-standing relationship with the Alawite, Circassian, and Druze communities², and Sunni rule in Iraq under Saddam Hussein³, while across the GCC states (Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates [UAE]), some of the most significant security portfolios are directly supported by Western expatriates.

The role of minority groups within Jordan presents a unique case study because of the fluidity and alien nature of their societal stratification and, subsequently, their predominant confinement to security related jurisdictions. Because the reign of King Hussein faced a dynamic threat environment, from both internal and external sources, it was crucial

for his own survival to have trusted personnel whom he could rely on. Thus, this article applies orthodox interpretations of regime security strategy to examine the role of Jordanian Circassian and Chechen communities under King Hussein.

Regime Security Strategy

Regime security is distinct from national and state security, and is defined as 'the condition where governing elites are secure from violent challenges to their rule'.⁴ Regime security strategy is nominally applied to non-Western third-world states, as, in contrast to Western conceptions of security, third-world security encapsulates 'the whole range of dimensions of a state's existence'⁵. This is compounded by Job's assumption that illiberal countries are inherently weak⁶ and thus determines the fact that 'for weak states, the domestic sphere is actually far more dangerous and threatening than the international sphere'.⁷

Due to the structure of power relations within illiberal states, one that heightens the significance of the regime over the state and the government, it is common for authoritarian forms of governance to dominate societal relations. Ayubi postulates that within a Middle Eastern context this has often ensured that power gravitates around three poles of power: Military, President, and the Party.⁸ According to Kamrava, Jordan is classified

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as a civic-myth monarchy⁹ and while the military has been a key tool in the construction of the Jordanian state, 'the survival of both the Jordanian and Moroccan monarchies ultimately depends on the loyalty of their armed forces'.¹⁰

There is a broad array of scholarship that examines the strategies, policies, and mechanisms with which authoritarian states employ to prolong their reign. Some of the most prominent have been Nathan's *Authoritarian Resilience*,¹¹ Brownlee's *Authoritarian Durability*,¹² Heydemann's *Upgrading Authoritarianism*¹³, Gerschewski's *Three Pillars of Stability*¹⁴, and Levitsky's *Competitive Authoritarianism*.¹⁵

Instead of looking at the wide array of approaches, the applied interpretation of regime security will focus on the regime's control of the coercive apparatus.

Quinlivan¹⁶, Brooks¹⁷, and Bellin¹⁸ lead the field of scholarship within this domain, and in doing so, illustrate several common themes. Quinlivan defines coup-proofing 'as the set of actions a regime takes to prevent a military coup'¹⁹ and highlights five common characteristics of this practice: exploitation of family, ethnic, and religious loyalties, parallel armed forces, development of multiple internal security agencies, fostering of expertness, and the ability to finance these

measures'.²⁰ Writing a year earlier, Brooks echoed many of Quinlivan's coup proofing theory, postulating four predominant approaches employed by Arab states to maintain power: increase non-military support cultivating social, economic and religious groups, court the military elites, disproportionately appoint minorities to key posts ('stacking the deck'), and frequently rotate elites.²¹ Bellin updates the analysis of regime security within the Middle East by framing this technique within a post-Arab Spring environment; she suggests four prevalent factors which have enabled Middle Eastern regimes to maintain power throughout this turbulent period: ensure funding for the coercive apparatus, cultivate international alliances, preserve the low institutionalisation of the coercive apparatus, and deter significant popular mobilisation.²²

While Bellin's analysis expands on previous scholarship by incorporating externally influencing factors, the present analysis focuses on the management practises of the regime itself. Building upon the scholarship of Quinlivan, Brooks, and Bellin, this analysis aims to highlight the four predominant traits of regime security within the Middle East:

- Exploitation of Tribal, Ethnic, and Sectarian Linkages
- Development of Coercive Apparatus
- Strategic Human Resources Management
- Guaranteed Financial Resources

This article will demonstrate how King Hussein relied upon minority groups throughout his reign, and employed these four strategies to reinforce his own reign.

Circassians and Chechens in Jordan

While the distinct identity and historiography of Circassian and Chechen communities within Jordan has only recently come to light, they were often grouped within their original designation within a Middle Eastern context: Mamlukes. Both communities originate from the North Caucasus and were victims of the Russian empire's aggression throughout the 19th century where many fled to the neighbouring Ottoman empire.²³ Ahmed Shurdom details that 'the real primary route for Circassians who settled in Jordan was from Circassia to Bulgaria to Turkey, then to Jordan'.²⁴

The earlier migration of Circassian and Chechen communities to the Middle East occurred in the 14th century²⁵ when Circassian slaves ruled Mamluke Egypt. The first dynasty occurred in 1382 when Emir Berkuck ruled the Burjite era. During his tenure, the Ottoman empire increased its presence within the Levant resulting in the initial formation of Circassian communities across Syria, Jordan, and Palestine. It should be noted that while Amman is the modern day capital of Jordan, it was previously only a village 'numbering around 5,000

inhabitants, the majority Circassians and Syrian merchants'.²⁶ Richmond notes that Circassian families started to arrive in Amman from 1878, however encountered considerable difficulties adjusting to the new environmental and social geography.²⁷

Due to the martial nature and steadfast mentality of Circassian and Chechen peoples, they have often been employed within the security apparatus of their host country. Posner firmly hypothesises that the 'Circassians have historically tried to protect their interests by supporting the regime in power'.²⁸ Distinct from their neighbours, the Ottomans employed the Circassians and Chechens as part of a border force against the Arabs, with the minority communities enjoying an enhanced role within the Trans-Jordan Frontier Force (TJFF).^{29,30}

Later under the British and its representative Captain Peake, the Transjordan Reserve Force was created and manned primarily by Circassians.³¹ This was the precursor to the Arab Legion and helps to explain why from such an early period the Circassians have been an integral aspect of the Jordanian military.

Brigadier General Mirza Pasha was a prominent Circassian within the Ottoman Empire's Arabian Peninsula protection force, later becoming a leading figure within King Abdullah's reign. Weightman highlights the significance of Mirza Pasha's support for King Abdullah by saying 'his later support helped make possible the establishment of the Hashemite monarchy in Transjordan'.³²

Deemed as neutral participants, the Circassians and Chechens were efficient partners in the de-escalation of tribal conflict within Transjordan. Surviving initial difficulties, the Circassians later aligned with the prominent Bani Sakhr against other tribes such as the Balqawiyeh, most predominantly in the 1900 war. Later when the Hashemites arrived in Transjordan in 1921, Circassian leaders welcomed Emir Abdullah into Amman and offered a team of personal bodyguards, forming the basis for the modern day Circassian Royal Guard.³³ Richmond further explains that the early leadership and dedication shown by the Circassians in defending the Hashemites against external threats laid the groundwork for their heightened political-military role within Jordan. Tai goes as far to hypothesise that 'co-opted by Abdullah at state formation, Circassians, Chechens, and Christians stocked the elite units of the armed forces and furnished policymakers who prospered in the upper echelons of the ruling coalition'.³⁴

The Circassians and Chechens have been widely employed across the Jordanian security apparatus, where, in addition to their monopoly within the Royal Guard, they have enjoyed considerable representation within the Jordanian Armed Forces, General Intelligence Department (GID), and Ministry

“THIS NARRATIVE FORMS PART OF A LARGER TREND WITHIN CIRCASSIAN HISTORY...”

of Interior (MOI). Posner even goes as far as saying that ‘Circassian fighters have long been considered among the most effective in the Middle East. Circassian soldiers once formed the backbone of King Hussein’s army in Jordan’.³⁵ This narrative forms part of a larger trend within Circassian history where, as Alon notes, Circassians fit an obvious profile for armed forces personnel: ‘Brunton recruited to the force (Arab Legion) ex-soldiers of the Ottoman and Arab Armies who were wandering the streets of Amman, as well as Circassians. The latter seemed perfect for the job’.³⁶

Literature pertaining to the Circassians and Chechens is generally limited, let alone when specified to Jordan. Beyond Mackey’s 1979 thesis³⁷, Shami’s 1984 PhD³⁸, Bullough’s *Let Our Fame be Great*³⁹, and a series of cultural and historical monologues by Jaimoukha⁴⁰, Jordanian Circassian and Chechen communities have tended to be a by-line in larger studies on Jordan.

This is somewhat understandable when seen in the context of Mackey’s notes that inform analysis, indicating that in 1979 Circassians made up 1% of the Jordanian population⁴¹ and in summary occupy a ‘disproportionately influential political and economic position’.⁴² Concentrations of Circassian and Chechen communities within

Jordan are in Amman, Jerash, Wadi Seer, Sweileh, Na’our, Zarqa, Rusaifa, Sukhneh, and Azraq Al-Shaishan. Because of the concentration of Circassian and Chechen communities within Amman, and the wealth this brought them when Amman was later designated the capital of Jordan, Circassian and Chechen communities were often the target of resentment from other communities.

A common strategic feature of the areas inhabited by the Circassians and Chechens was that they all were situated close to sources of fresh water, and were urban in nature; that contrasts with the Arab tribes who thrived in rural desert environments. The collective emotional trauma and social code, Adiga Khabza, that binds the minority communities distinguishes them from their Arab counterparts and heavily emphasises loyalty, patriarchy, and discipline. The pre-installed virtues mirror the values required to succeed within a military career and help to rationalise why and how their relationship with the Hashemite monarchy has thrived.

Building upon the relationship between the monarchy and the Circassian and Chechen communities, the 1928 electoral law reserved two seats (now three) for the minority groups at a favourable rate (one seat for every 5,000 citizens versus one seat for every 27,000 Arabs). The decision to denote Amman as the capital of Transjordan also gave the Circassians an advantage, as this is where they enjoyed a heightened presence and owned a lot of land around the city. This allowed Circassian figures to be heavily prominent within the early stages of Jordanian history, with Omar Hickmat assuming the position as Minister of Justice, Wasfi Pasha (son of Mirza Pasha), and Saeed Pasha al Mufti all key examples of this analysis – the latter was a mainstay in Jordan’s early political leadership assuming the office of Prime Minister three times over his civil service career (1950, 1955, and 1956).⁴³ Furthermore, Circassian leaders Walid Tash and Mohammed Ali Amin Shuqman held senior positions within the foreign ministry serving as Secretary General and Foreign Minister respectively.

Considering their diminutive profile within Jordanian society, it is surprising that so many Circassian and Chechen Jordanians retained so much power, so uniformly under King Hussein. Therefore, the relationship between King Hussein and the Circassian and Chechen minorities presents a unique case study for the observation of regime security strategy within the Middle East.

Manifestations of Internal Threats to King Hussein

King Hussein was inaugurated as King of Jordan on the 2nd May 1953 and had been heavily exposed to the trials and tribulations of leadership before he took office. Throughout his reign, King Hussein faced a series of threats which

if managed differently, would have led to a republican revolution.

Jordan's position between Egypt, Israel, Palestinian Territories, Syria, Iraq, and Saudi Arabia has consistently stressed the Kingdom's internal security dynamics. The osmosis of political ideologies into Jordan, and particularly Arab Nationalism, Muslim Brotherhood, and Salafi Islam, as well as the significant presence and frustrations of Palestinians within Jordan, have all contributed to the insecurity dilemma of the Jordanian monarchy.

Since the United Nation's 1947 decision to partition British mandated Palestine, the neighbouring Emirate of Transjordan faced a considerable threat from the Palestinians whom it was believed would attempt to undermine Hashemite rule.⁴⁴ While initially united by a desire to retain Palestinian lands, Arab forces combated the UN resolution, under the leadership of Glubb Pasha. The Arab Legion held the West Bank ensuring the Palestinians a homeland; significantly, one that was not Jordan. King Abdullah bin Hussein accepted the partition of Palestine to ensure the cohesion and integrity of his own Kingdom, albeit, per critics, at the cost of the Palestinians.⁴⁵

While Abdullah failed to normalise relations with the Israelis, his willingness to engage them over potential boundaries enraged many Arab states and the Palestinian

population. Consequently, on the 20th July 1951 he was assassinated by a Palestinian nationalist whilst attending Friday prayers at Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem. His Grandson, King Hussein was accompanying him on this trip and was also targeted by the assassin, however quite remarkably, was saved by the fact that a military medal attached to his uniform deflected the bullet that was intended to take his life.⁴⁶ The care and support offered by members of the Arab Legion and his royal guard left an imprint on his mind-set, one that heightened his relationship to the military and its personnel. Therefore, and in line with regime security strategy, the political-military relationship was a critical and paramount concern for King Hussein throughout his reign.

Crisis of 1957

Pressured by anti-colonial and nationalist organisations such as the Free Jordanian Officers, and a growing deterioration in their professional relationship, King Hussein dismissed Glubb Pasha in 1956. A key advisor and friend to King Hussein throughout this period was Major Ali Abu Nuwar. He was the Jordanian defence attaché to France while King Hussein was at Sandhurst in the UK, and upon the King's return to Amman, Ali Abu Nuwar was appointed King Hussein's Aide de Camp (ADC).

While Ali Abu Nuwar did not immediately take over from Glubb Pasha, he was appointed Major

General and Chief of Staff of the Arab Legion three months after Glubb Pasha's dismissal.⁴⁷ Some accounts suggest that Ali Abu Nuwar's appointment was aimed at appeasing sections of the military and preventing the possible formation of a praetorian guard. In hindsight, King Hussein clearly understood that it was crucial for the survival of the monarchy to retain the allegiance of the Armed Forces, with Lunt highlighting 'Hussein's chief concern was his army'.⁴⁸

Motivated by pan-Arab nationalist and Baathist ideology, and combined with a ground swell of republican support, which had been bolstered by the dismissal of Prime Minister Sulayman al-Nabulsi, Ali Abu Nuwar executed a coup attempt in April 1957. For his involvement, Ali Abu Nuwar was exiled to Syria and the military's support for the monarchy thrived. Since then, material support for the Jordanian military has increased and 'so long as the legion in Jordan remains a privileged group in this material-economic sense, the possibility of coups is not eradicated but lessened'.⁴⁹ Dann notes that because of the attempted coup by educated secularists 'Hussein and the army's beduin [sic] contingent had recognised their mutual dependence'.⁵⁰

The threat of 1957 emanated primarily from the military, and particularly from its headquarters in Zarqa. While King Hussein could quietly

and delicately de-escalate tensions, a period of reflection and observation was needed to assess the weaknesses and vulnerabilities highlighted by this event. Reorganising all tiers of the military, King Hussein relied upon trusted allies such as Habis al-Majali and Sadiq al-Shar'a to implement further changes and investigations. Some reports suggest up to 200 officers were relieved of duty for their involvement in this affair with Mackey noting that no Circassian officer was implicated in the 1957 plot.⁵¹ The virtue of loyalty, which is strongly adorned in Circassian and Chechen culture, also helps to explain why a Circassian Brigadier General 'Izzat Hassan Quandour, was appointed to take charge of the Zerqa investigation'⁵² and suggests, as part of a larger trend, a respect for the minority's impartiality in times of significant instability.

Crisis of 1958

In response to the spread of Arab Nationalism and the 22nd February 1958 formation of the United Arab Republic (UAR), the two houses of the Hashemite monarchy united to form the Arab Federation of Iraq and Jordan. Upon discovery, and further assisted by the Israelis, it came to King Hussein's attention that simultaneous coups were being planned in Baghdad and Amman with assistance from Arab nationalists in the UAR.

In Jordan, the manifestation of this threat was led by Lieutenant Colonel

Mahmud Rusan, who had just returned from the US as Deputy Chief of the Jordanian Embassy.⁵³

On the 14th July 1958, the Iraqi branch of the Hashemite monarchy were slaughtered along with several high ranking political officials from the Arab Federation.⁵⁴ Dann hypothesises that Rusan planned to murder King Hussein in his palace and proclaim a republic in its place.

Understanding the peril of his circumstance, insofar that a cousin had been murdered by republicans, prevalent sympathy of Arab nationalism across the Middle East, and securitisation of social opposition from the Palestinians and educated liberals, King Hussein fell back upon the traditional tenants of support and allegiance: namely the military.

Reacting nearly immediately where possible, loyal sections of the Jordanian Armed Forces prevented popular uprisings in prominent urban centres by employing preventative tactics such as martial law. An observation of the relative calm of Nablus within this turbulent period was attributed to 'Brigadier 'Izzat Hasan, who as a Circassian was considered impervious to treachery and thus given a free hand'.⁵⁵

Hussein was suffocated on all sides as Nasser's UAR attempted to encroach on Jordan, while Saudi Arabia denied overflights to Jordan, and resultantly, King Hussein accepted Israeli assistance against the republican threat closing in on Amman.⁵⁶ King Hussein's deliberation and discussion of the fragility of the situation with his parliament and senate, and the necessity to work with Israel, is claimed by Lunt to have safeguarded his reign.⁵⁷ When speaking about the Saudi betrayal of Jordan in his autobiography King Hussein notes: 'to the end of my life I will never forget this action against my country and my people in this hour of need'.⁵⁸ The observation of King Hussein's predicament and reliance on traditional values such as loyalty and allegiance helps to explain the strength of the relationship between the Jordanian monarchy and the Circassian and Chechen communities.

Empowered by a growing population of British soldiers, King Hussein positioned Bedouin troops in Amman, and made regular visits to the military headquarters in Zarqa in a bid to rally support and allegiance. There were several high-profile dismissals and subsequent promotions, and ensured a bulwark for King Hussein's reign. After a period of self-led isolation, King Hussein again reshuffled the military hierarchy and employed his uncle, Sharif Nasir bin Jamil to lead the purges within the military.⁵⁹

**“PUSHED BACK
BY ISRAELI
FORCES,
PALESTINIAN
FEDAYEEN
RETREATED
INTO JORDANIAN
TERRITORY...”**

Black September 1970

The most significant and destructive moment in Jordan's history was the 1970 civil war. Motivated by years of demoralising defeats at the hands of the Israelis, growing confidence of fedayeen (insurgents) operating within Jordan, and a significant increase in Palestinian refugees resettling in Jordan following the 1967 war, the Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO) publically confronted King Hussein in a bid to subvert his reign and commandeer Jordan for its own resource.

Split across numerous groups, including the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP), and independent fedayeen units, the conglomerate faction of Palestinian fighters within Jordan was the PLO. It was headed by Yasser Arafat and enjoyed significant material and diplomatic support from Egypt⁶⁰, Syria, and the Soviet Union (USSR).

Pushed back by Israeli forces, Palestinian fedayeen retreated into Jordanian territory, enticing engagement between Israeli and Jordanian forces. This resulted in a classical insecurity dilemma for King Hussein as he did not have a monopoly over the application of violence within his territory. As Bailey notes 'beginning in April 1969, however, the attitude of the regime itself (King Hussein's)

stiffened toward fedayeen operations from Jordan'.⁶¹ The interpretation of security policies and directives of King Hussein's reign indicate a dichotomy where any move to secure his own rule, authority, and territorial integrity would irk regional "allies" as it was common for this to be in contravention of the regional good. This was mainly due to the region wide support for the Palestinians and when placed in context of the 1967 war and Arab nationalism, King Hussein was stuck in a policy dichotomy that could have led to his usurpation.

However, this meant that Jordan and King Hussein would have to bear the price and responsibility of Palestinian actions. This reached a climax in February 1970 when after months of aggression between Israel and the fedayeen within Jordanian territory, often injuring Jordanian bystanders and stressing Israeli-Jordanian ties, King Hussein imposed 10 restrictions upon the Fedayeen.⁶² Palestinian groups reacted, immediately organising into military commands and engaged in clashes in Amman, where over 300 were killed. Throughout 1970 Jordanian military units and political entities were commonly targeted by Palestinians and King Hussein narrowly survived a series of assassination attempts by the PLO and its affiliates.⁶³ The Palestinians also routinely kidnapped Jordanian military personnel and the 1970 detention of two Circassian GID officers near Zarqa was a standout

example, as one of the two captives, Awni Yervas, later became the Minister of Interior (MOI).⁶⁴

While Arafat claimed to be in opposition to violence towards King Hussein and Jordan, he was unable to curtail violence from groups operating under his banner. When the PFLP hijacked three airplanes 'Arafat felt he could not discredit them and retain his position of leadership. As a result, he joined the extremists'.⁶⁵ The result of Arafat's decision not only united these groups under the PLO, but also polarised Jordan and emboldened the monarchy, where like in previous scenarios, King Hussein fell back upon the military for support and imposed military rule. In order to do this however, King Hussein had to fire the pro-Palestinian Chief of Staff, Manshoor Haditha and bring out of retirement Field Marshal Habis Majali⁶⁶; Majali had previously been a key ally in the 1957 crisis.

Understanding that Jordan was under a blanket of Palestinian control, with many cities and security units dominated by Palestinians, the King utilised the military and trusted allies to purge the Kingdom of the internal threat to his rule. On 17th September, the Jordanian military targeted Palestinian political offices, refugee camps, and other parts of the city they had come to dominate. Earlier on the 14th September, the newly appointed head of the GID, Major General Natheer Pasha Rashid fired a third of his officers who had declared

their allegiance to the PLO.⁶⁷ Over two weeks the Jordanian army heavily attacked and engaged Palestinian forces across Jordan. There were several prominent Circassians within the military during Black September with brothers, Tahseen and Ihsan Shurdom standout examples. The former was a Brigadier General and Commander of the Special Forces while Tahseen was commander of the 62nd Special Forces brigade. Tahseen was later appointed Head of Military Intelligence, Chief of Staff, and Director of Public Security while Ihsan commanded the Royal Jordanian Air Force (RJAF).

King Hussein successfully reclaimed his kingdom, evicting the PLO and other guerrillas from his territory. Coupled with loss of responsibility of the West Bank because of the failed 1967 war, King Hussein could concentrate on Jordanian nationalist discourse and disregard parallel ideological threats with whom were now beholden to the Monarchy. This allowed him to continue his state and nation building programme through the vehicle of the military, as

“KING HUSSEIN SUCCESSFULLY RECLAIMED HIS KINGDOM...”

it served a dual purpose of shoring his ideological and physical reign. This programme ensured a heightened presence for the Circassians and Chechens with whom dominate the range of Jordanian security entities.

Significance of the Circassians under Hussein

As a minority group with intimate links to the Hashemite dynasty, the future of the Circassians and Chechens in Jordan is intimately linked to that of the Monarch. As a non-Arab liberal Muslim group, the Circassians and Chechens were relied upon throughout King Hussein's reign for support in face of ideological threats such as Arab Nationalism and Palestinian independence. The collective experience of the Circassians and Chechens at the hands of the Russians also grounds their mindset and helps to drive their allegiance to the ruling power in each domain they reside. Because of their professionalism, ideological impartiality, allegiance to the monarchy, and technocratic rise in the British led Arab Legion, Circassian officers were in an optimal space to assume early leadership within the Jordanian Armed Forces. This continued

throughout the reign of King Hussein and resulted in widespread participation in the military and political elite. In a statement of intent, King Hussein's eldest daughter, Princess Alia bint Hussein married Nasser Wasfi Mirza, the son of prominent Circassian politician Wasfi Mirza.

The recruitment and figures relating to Circassian participation within the Jordanian military during King Hussein's rule remain imprecise; however, there is an acknowledgement that they made up ten per cent of the whole officer corps.⁶⁸ Vatikiotis notes that in 1956, Jordanian Circassians commanded two of ten infantry regiments, and when put in context of the British managing five regiments, helps to underscore early on that the Circassians were a dominant presence within the Jordanian Armed Forces.⁶⁹ Further stressing this, and in the context of the 1957, 1957, and Black September crises, 'by the 1980s, four Circassians had served in succession as directors of Jordanian security'.⁷⁰

Reviewing the instability caused by Black September, Posner asserts that 'Circassian officers and fighting men played a critical role in crushing an effort to overthrow Hussein's Hashemite monarchy'.⁷¹ Due to their fierce loyalty to the monarchy however, they were often the target of violence by the Palestinians, and Shurdom was forced to dispel the notion that there was a 'special militia unit made up of Circassian[s]

and under a Circassian command, who implemented these operations and killed the Palestinians'.⁷² Yet, as Mackey notes, the most advanced and capable unit within the Jordanian armed forces was the Commando unit and 'It is predominantly Circassian (approximately 75-80%) and was heavily used in the civil strife during 1970'.⁷³

Conclusion

It has been shown that throughout King Hussein's early reign he was dependent upon the military. In a series of classical coup-proofing manoeuvres King Hussein manipulated and selectively strengthened his armed forces at times of critical instability. A key aspect of this was his relationship with the Circassian and Chechen communities. In context of such little stature, the wide proliferation of appointments within security related roles highlights King Hussein's interpretation of the significance of the Circassians and Chechens within his regime security strategy. While relying on elder trusted allies in times of need, consistently, King Hussein relied upon the minority groups for his bulwark.

It is also evident that while consistently the Circassians and Chechens did rise to the top of the military professions, they were aided by the stressed importance of the Jordanian Armed Forces. Their martial and physical traits further aided their progression where even in

Prominent Military Positions Assumed by Jordanian Circassians under King Hussein

Name	Position (s)	Period
Ibrahim Pasha Othman Kashoqa	1st Commander of the RJAF	1956-1962
Izzat Pasha Qandour	9th Commander of the Jordanian Public Security Directorate	1969-1970
Anwar Pasha Mohammed	12th Commander of the Jordanian Public Security Directorate	1971-1976
Ma'moun Pasha Khalil Ha'opsh	14th Commander of the Jordanian Public Security Directorate	1979-1981
Mohammed Pasha Idris Dodokh	15th Commander of the Jordanian Public Security Directorate	1981-1984
Thyab Pasha Yousef	16th Commander Jordanian of the Public Security Directorate	1984-1985
Tahseen Shurdom	22nd Director of Public Security Chief of Staff and Head of Military Intelligence	2002-2004
Ihsan Shurdom	9th Commander of the Royal Jordanian Air Force (RJAF)	1983-1993
Awni Pasha Belal	10th Commander of the RJAF	1993-1994
Hussein Pasha Ahmad Shodash Shapsoug	16th Commander of the RJAF	2006-2010
Ahmad Ala'addin al-Shishani	General Inspector and Commander of the Jordanian Armed Forces	
Awni Yervas	Minister of Interior	
Izzat Hasan Quandour	Chief of Staff	
Fawwaz Mahir Birmamit	Chief of Staff	
Mohammed Idris	Chief of Staff	
Walid Tash	Secretary General of the Foreign Ministry	
Mohammed Ali Amin	Governor of Amman	1987-
Kheiredin Hakouz	Former Commander of the Special Forces Circassian Member of Parliament	
Mansour Pasha Hakouz	Commander of the Southern Region General Inspector of the Army	
Tareq Pasha Ala'eddin Bersik	7th Commander of the GID	
Umran Khamash	Brigadier General in the Jordanian Special Forces & Governor of Jerash	

the modern day, there are Circassian and Chechen only battalions within the Jordanian special forces. That is in combination with the Jordanian Royal Guard which is made up only of Circassian soldiers.

While King Hussein rotated his military's leadership to deny the development of a praetorian guard, it has been shown that the Circassian community was a long standing trusted ally of King Hussein. The evidence of Circassian leadership within the military and public security directorate indicates the communities' domination of the Jordanian security apparatus.

Due to their apolitical stance throughout King Hussein's rule, the monarchy could rely on the minority group for support at critical junctures. While in the short term the presence of Circassians and Chechen physically ensured the survival of the monarchy in Jordan, they also emboldened King Hussein during his negotiations with Israel and other international actors. Because of these negotiations, Jordan could benefit from financial packages and thus aid the continuation of Hashemite rule.

The evidence of such a small minority evoking such dependability and allegiance helps scholarship to understand the durability of regimes within the Middle East. Where within the same period, civil war and interstate conflict induced periods of instability, the Jordanian

military provided the Hashemite monarchy with unrivalled stability and conformity. As a product of a long running program of nation and state building, the Jordanian Armed Forces will remain a long and trusted ally of the Hashemite monarchy. The Circassians and Chechens play a significant role within this and thus cannot be overlooked in the evaluation of the stability of the monarchy in Jordan.

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- ⁶⁰ Egypt did support the fedayeen however Nasser wanted to reduce their bargaining position for future negotiations.
- ⁶¹ C. Bailey, *Jordan's Palestinian Challenge, 1948-1983: A Political History*. Boulder: Westview Press, 1984. 43.
- ⁶² 1. Only authorised officials may remand a citizen in custody 2. The fedayeen are forbidden to obstruct the work of the public security forces 3. Fedayeen must carry an I.D. card at all times and show it to the public security forces on demand 4. Fedayeen are forbidden to shoot fire-arms in populated areas 5. Fedayeen forbidden to bear arms in Amman and in other public places and on public transport 6. Fedayeen are forbidden to store explosives in cities and villages 7. All fedayeen cars must carry official license plates 8. It is forbidden to hold gatherings, meetings, and conferences without permission of the Ministry of Interior (MOI) 9. It is forbidden to publish newspapers except in accordance with official regulations 10. Fedayeen are forbidden to engage in political party activities, in Bailey, *Jordan's Palestinian Challenge*, 47.
- ⁶³ J. Lunt, *Hussein of Jordan, a political biography*. London: Macmillan, 1989. 125.
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ENCOUNTERS WITH ORTHODOXY: HOW
PAKISTAN'S 'BLASPHEMY LAW' UNDERMINES
RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY

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Introduction and Historical Reasons

Debate regarding the role of Islam in the creation of Pakistan has remained a central and contentious issue throughout Pakistan's history. Muhammad Ali Jinnah, the founder of Pakistan led a campaign that was blended in the region's political, cultural and religious realities.¹ To this day, scholars remain divided over the question of whether Pakistan Movement was truly motivated by religion or the use of religion became necessary in order to mobilize Muslim masses of the subcontinent region.² Moreover, scholars also continue to puzzle over the question of whether Jinnah wanted a progressive and secular state or a religious and theocratic state.³

If one is to closely follow Jinnah's statements and the way he approached the Pakistan Movement, it becomes clear that he himself was torn between two extremes that dealt with creating a state which ought to be progressive in nature or a theocratic one, which should be conservative in outlook and practice. Amid these two extremes lingered Jinnah's dilemma: Jinnah preferred an independent Muslim state that would follow progressive and liberal ideals of Islam rather than reactionary and conservative Islam.⁴ However, in essence, majority of Jinnah's followers didn't agree with his vision of a liberal and secular Muslim state whose electoral strength was virtually based on the argument of

creating an 'Islamic Muslim state'. Moreover, in this regard, Jinnah's dilemma stayed with his inability to mobilize the Muslim masses beyond the perimeters of Muslim political identity, which perhaps remained one of his biggest challenges.

As Tunzelmann notes that 'In the face of resurgent Islamic nationalism inside his own state, he [Jinnah] continued to insist that "Pakistan is not going to be a theocratic state to be ruled by priests with a divine mission. We have many non-Muslims – Hindus, Christians and Priests – but they are all Pakistanis. They will enjoy the same rights and privileges as any other citizens and will play their rightful part in the affairs of Pakistan"'.⁵ Further highlighting Jinnah's predicament of engaging with the idea of Muslim identity politics, Alex contends that 'Jinnah's strategy to achieve Pakistan by exploiting the extremes of identity politics had been extraordinarily successful. Unfortunately his plan to run Pakistan as a progressive liberal democracy with a moderate Islamic flavor had been marked less worked out'.⁶

It's a bitter reality that after spending two decades stirring up Islamic passions, Jinnah wanted to implement a progressive version of Islam in Pakistan which practically seemed impossible as a large number of Jinnah's Muslim supporters had a very different idea of what Pakistan might be. All in all, conservative

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Islamist forces didn't agree with Jinnah's idea of establishing an Islamic state and then setting it on a liberal and secular course.

In the years leading up to the partition of India, seeds of hatred, bigotry and discrimination were sowed among the masses on the basis of their religious affiliations.⁷ Immediately after Pakistan became an independent state in 1947, it was not just non-Muslims that became victims of discriminatory identity politics: a number of minority Muslim groups also came to experience a systematic victimization and deprivation of basic human rights in the name of implementing true Islamic values.⁸

Jinnah who rightly wanted to keep religion and state apart, became the first major victim of his country's political and religious elite's vision that not only sought to establish Pakistan as an Islamic state but also a state that legitimized and institutionalized 'Sunni majoritarianism', which intensified following the partition of Pakistan.⁹ Pakistan's more than 70 percent population adheres to the Sunni sect of Islam and has over the last six decades attained central role in terms of defining religious legitimacy, ideological acceptance and rejection and citizenship at the constitutional and state level.¹⁰

However ironic it may seem but the founder of Pakistan, a Shia Muslim

by Islamic faith was given two separate funerals: One funeral that was held privately followed Shia rituals and the other which was held publically and attended by thousands of Pakistanis was according to Sunni rituals.¹¹ As Kalia in his book, *Pakistan: From the Rhetoric of Democracy to the Rise of Militancy* argues that 'The two funerals symbolized not an expression of religious toleration but a political choice to appropriate Jinnah to the dominant Sunni strain of Islam – repudiating not only Jinnah's personal Shia faith but also his secular political beliefs'.¹² Debate over Jinnah's belief was only a preface to religious zealotry that commenced after his death.

As Ahmad and Rafique argue that 'The Muslim League leadership heralded the Pakistan movement that eventually assumed the character of an ever expanding project of Islamization after partition. The state sought to use religion as an instrument of policy of legitimizing partition and later de-ethnicizing politics. Over the years, religion sought to define the state itself'.¹³

The Blasphemy Law and the institutionalizing of 'majoritarian' Islamist politics

After the passing of Jinnah, Pakistan's political leadership could not resist demands of Islamist parties to introduce Sharia system in the country. Jinnah's vision of treating all communities equally without the difference of faith was never truly implemented in Pakistan. Striping the country's minority Muslim and non-Muslim communities of their basic human rights began right after partition. The persecution of the country's minority Muslim communities that began in 1948 became widespread in 1953 when fundamentalist groups incited by Sunni conservative clerks destroyed Ahmadya Muslim community's places of worship.¹⁴ The attack on the Ahmadya community in 1953 was actually the widespread beginning of a 'violent narrative' that eventually manifested in the form of the Blasphemy Law which institutionalized bigotry, intolerance and discrimination on the basis of a majoritarian view of what a Islamic religious practice was appropriate and acceptable in the country.

In a famous case in Pakistan, called the 'Zaheeruddin v. State' which defines the institutionalization of majoritarian politics and Islamization of the country, a top court in Pakistan gave a verdict that Ahmadi Muslims cannot even challenge the constitutionality of the Blasphemy law by using Article 20 of the constitution which promises freedom of religion to all citizens. Moreover, to validate its verdict the court said that by practicing their religion 'the Ahmadi would interfere with the human rights of others and so they are not protected by Article 20 of the constitution'.¹⁵ Basically the court argued that Ahmadi Muslim sect which doesn't even make 2 % of the country's population by only

practicing its religion can interfere and undermine the human rights of more than 60 % of the country's Sunni population.

The codification of the Blasphemy Law doesn't only discriminate among Muslims on the basis of 'majoritarianism and minoritarianism' Islamic identity but also demonizes non Muslim communities by directly and indirectly segregating them by presenting them as a threat to Islam and its values. As Ispahani in her book, *Purifying the Land of the Pure: A History of Pakistan's Religious Minorities*, argues that 'Religious freedom and the rights of religious minorities to live in peace is being threatened by communal majoritarianism, which has been at the heart of Pakistan's policies over the years. This trend reflects the majority insistence that the religious minorities practice their faith and culture within limits prescribed by the majority'.¹⁶

A secular law that was enacted during the colonial period for the protection of all religious communities existing in the subcontinent at that time was turned into an instrument of discrimination in 1986 in Pakistan. The act of blasphemy under article 295 (c) of the constitution was made punishable by death. The article 295-C of Pakistan's 1973 constitution says that 'Whoever by words, either spoken or written, or by visible representation or by any imputation, innuendo, or insinuation, directly or

indirectly, defiles the sacred name of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) shall be punished with death, or imprisonment for life, and shall also be liable to fine'.¹⁷

In Pakistan, while Blasphemy has always been interpreted as a criminal act, by terming even 'insinuation' an act punishable by death, the law virtually opened the flood gates of violence, mainly against Minority Muslim and non-Muslim groups. Moreover, the issue of blasphemy that was forced into the language of the 1973 constitution by religious hardliners belonging to the Sunni sect of Islam, not only further ascertained religious majoritarianism in Pakistan but also commenced a process of radicalization which has since remained at the forefront of right-wing endeavors that continue to enable militant evangelists and encourage religious hatred in the country. As Rajan notes that 'The numerical dominance of Sunni Muslims in Pakistan soon engendered Sunni hegemony in nationalist discourse...The hegemony of Sunni Islam fostered a definition of Islam in Pakistan that privileged orthodox Sunni ideologies'.¹⁸

Since the codification of the law, more than 2000 cases have been registered under the Blasphemy law.¹⁹ As far as the nature of the charges is concerned, observers argue that a majority of the accusations are motivated by personal disputes. Mainly three types of blasphemy

cases have been registered ranging from mere accusations to settling scores and expressing one's own faith.²⁰ Extrajudicial killings in blasphemy cases have become increasingly common with more than 65 people being killed since 1990 while their cases were pending in courts. At least eight of these cases have occurred in the last few years alone with a lawyer shot dead over the issue of representing an accuse of blasphemy, a man killed inside prison, a Christian couple burned to death by an enraged mob and a student killed by his fellow classmates for allegedly committing blasphemy.

One of the most shocking murders related to the issue of blasphemy took place in 2011 when Pakistan's Punjab province Governor, Salman Taseer, was murdered by his own security guard, Mumtaz Qadri in Islamabad. Primarily, Taseer was assassinated for publically defending a Christian woman who was accused of committing blasphemy and asking for amendments to the law in order to prevent its misuse. Qadri and thousands of other hardliners justified

“QADRI WAS HAILED AS A HERO BY THOUSANDS ...”

Taseer's killing on the basis that the latter had asked for the revision to the blasphemy law which amounts to committing an act of blasphemy itself.²¹ Shortly after killing Taseer, Qadri was hailed as a hero by thousands of Pakistanis while hundreds of lawyers gathered in courts to take his case.

In fact, the country's courts were directly threatened by fundamentals and the judges hearing his case, feared for their lives. While Qadri was hanged in 2016, the court in its final verdict didn't discuss the issue of Blasphemy and whether the law had been misused. Instead, the court justified its verdict on the basis that Qadri had been sentenced to death for taking law into his own hands.

The law has left such a deep mark on the national consciousness regarding the role of Islam in the state's identity formation that even if the law could somehow be changed, which appears a challenge, it would not stop lynchings, extrajudicial killings, discrimination against minorities and mob violence. 'People participating in mob violence are not trying to implement existing laws, nor does the state have such behavioral control over the people that overturning the law will halt mob lynching. What the law does is to allow the state to hide behind religio-legalities and prevent its framing as a human

rights issue, positioning the state as another antagonist instead of the protector and guarantor of life', argues Brohi.²²

Deploying religion for politics: Pandering to Islamists

While the first two decades of Pakistan's independence were ruled by political leaders who were liberal and progressive in outlook, they all buckled under the pressure of the country's fundamentalist clergy either to safeguard their own regimes or to undermine the efforts of their political rivals.²³

In 1974, Zulfiaqar Ali Bhutto in order to gain support and sympathies of Islamists amended the country's constitution to declare Muslim Ahmadya community as Non-Muslims. Eventually, Zia ul Haq to further broaden his conservative support base, made it illegal for Ahmadis to call themselves Muslims.²⁴ The blasphemy law was passed through parliament under Zia's military regime without any broad debate or developing consensus among religious scholars of different Islamic sects. None of Zia's successive governments have seriously tried to tackle the issue of blasphemy. During the late 1980s and early 1990s, political parties in Pakistan patronized Islamists for political gains. Particularly, during the last three decades, Pakistan's ruling elite has openly offered orthodox Sunnis more legitimate claims on the state than other Islamic

sects. Islamists on their part have used their extended influence and close connection between Islam and Pakistani citizenship as a source of ideological legitimacy to lobby for laws and constitutional amendments which have gradually marginalized minority Muslim and non-Muslim communities.

Even the credibility and legitimacy of politicians and persons on decision making positions is measured on the basis of the brand of Islam they practice or represent rather than the kinds of policies they hope to implement. As Tudor contends that 'The salience of religion in public life has steadily grown over time because political parties and military both turn to Islam as a means of bolstering their waning legitimacy'.²⁵

Arguably, even elected civilians lack ideological legitimacy due to their observance to liberal democratic principles, which the Islamists consider un-Islamic. Democratic regimes in Pakistan have continued to appease the Islamists 'by enshrining Islamic provisions in the constitution and seeking from them appropriate Islamic terminology and its ideological metaphor for policy making purposes'.²⁶

Moreover, the military regimes in Pakistan have lacked popular and constitutional legitimacy and in order to stay in power it has actively placated 'the Islamists to benefit from their ideological legitimacy, the best

“THE COUNTRY HAS NOT BEEN ABLE TO IMPLEMENT A SINGLE MAJOR STRATEGIC ASPECT OF ITS BROAD COUNTER TERRORISM PLAN ...”

it can achieve in terms of gaining legitimacy’.²⁷

The government of President Pervez Musharraf in 2000 attempted to make some amendments in the law but relentless opposition from Islamist parties forced him into abandoning any reforms.²⁸ For more than a decade Pakistan has struggled to deal with its militancy problem as militancy and religious extremism have besieged the country. In 2014, the country launched a National Action Plan (NAP), a twenty point strategy to tackle militancy in the country, which also contained steps to tackle Islamist elements conservative and radical narratives including reducing their influence and mass public support.

So far, the country has not been able to implement a single major strategic aspect of its broad counter terrorism plan designed to tackle the rapid rise of extremism in the country. For instance, one of the core aspects of the NAP was to ensure that all religious seminaries in the country go through a reformation process and are registered with the government. However, so far any efforts to achieve this objective have been thwarted by the country’s religious elite. This has happened due to two reasons. One, the political elite’s infighting have again divided them among themselves and all political parties in the country have been

appeasing Islamists again to ensure their support for electoral and other reasons. Second, the country’s political elite continues to remain reluctant from using the state’s full power to clamp down on Islamist groups because of the perceived threat of a political backlash.

Unfortunately, the government’s efforts to curtail Islamists public influence that limits the state’s actions and policies in a number of ways, remained short lived. The space which the state was able to gain from the Islamists due to the implementation of some polices under the NAP, such as putting efforts to initiate a process to build a progressive and liberal narrative of Islam, have been lost again.

The current government in Pakistan has tried to introduce a number of liberal and progressive legislations which have been actively resisted by the Islamists. Clearly, the country remains plagued with ideological differences. The state’s policies of giving Islamists a central in all spheres of life have virtually transformed Islamist groups into powerful actors that have a large popular support base in the country which may challenge the state at will.

Competing political interests in the country have, once again, forced political elites into courting Islamists for political and electoral gains. The government and opposition political parties and interest groups

have openly held meetings with the leaders of various proscribed Islamist organizations in an effort to shore up their support for the next general elections which are scheduled to be held in June 2018. Moreover, a number of Islamist groups in the country have been trying to become part of the Pakistan’s political arena.²⁹

It’s likely that a coalition of Islamist parties may emerge before the next general elections to challenge the state’s overall counter terrorism policies and the political elite’s recent efforts to change a number of rigid laws that have marginalized the country’s minority communities. One proscribed militant organization called the Jamaat-ud-Dawa (JuD), recently registered a political party with the Election Commission of Pakistan.

While the leader of the JuD remains under house arrest from last few months, the militant organization’s political and social wings remain active on the ground.³⁰ The party recently took part in a by-election in Pakistan’s Punjab province despite’s the country’s interior ministry’s reservations that the party remains a security threat. To everyone’s surprise, the candidate who contested the election with the JuD’s active support was able to squeeze more than 5500 votes, leaving behind the candidate of the Pakistan People’s Party (PPP), which has ruled Pakistan thrice in the past.

One of the primary concerns in this regard deals with political stakeholder's apologetic and compromising attitudes toward Islamic groups in the country. These right-wing forces are not only deepening the country's ideological divides by violently imposing their own brand of Islam but are also challenging the state's writ every day by reversing any progressive and liberal legislations and attitudes. While the execution of Qadri, the killer of Taseer, was ordered by the military, the government in 2016 could not prevent handful of Islamists from entering the county's capital to celebrate Qardi's actions. Instead, the government gave in to the protesters demands of not introducing any changes to the blasphemy law.

In a recently written article for the South Asian Voices, titled, Need for a grand counter narrative in Pakistan's counter terrorism strategy, I argued that 'While radical groups cite the prevention of threats to religion and its defense as the main justification behind their use of violence, consolidated efforts by right-wing political factions to entrench conservatism in Pakistan have exacerbated these narratives. Hardliners in Pakistan often exploit Islam's generally-accepted conservative outlook in their public communications, which usually draw hundreds, and sometimes even thousands, of people to the streets against the country's ruling liberal elite'.³¹

Is it possible to change the law?

The question of changing the law has increasingly become a complex and daunting task. Certainly any effort to change the law will lead to a serious confrontation between conservative Islamic forces and political elites. Moreover, for the country's Islamist parties, keeping the blasphemy law intact offers protection and importance to their ideological legitimacy which they continue to tap to revive their flagging significance in electoral terms. However, the really alarming fact is that as of this moment there doesn't appear to be an effort or willingness at the state level to take on the issue with seriousness. Moreover than anything, the worrying prospect is that in the coming years even if the law and violence which it engenders broad support to became untenable for the power elite, would they be able to amend it?

One of the biggest challenges in terms of changing the Blasphemy law deals with countering the mass public support which exists in the form of public support for the law which Islamists groups in the country continue to exploit to undermine the state's efforts to amend it. How does the state convince hundreds of thousands of people that amending the law do not harm Islam's image in any way? How does the state ensure that the country's minority groups are not targeted under the guise of this law when anything under the guise of the law is considered a sacred act itself? Amending the law would

mean going against the masses demands and wishes which can also trigger a major conflict in the country with the state taking on its citizens. While expressing her concerns regarding the challenge of revising the law, Brohi argues that 'By the time Pakistan decides to take up the challenge of amending the law it may be too late to address the one issue the state cannot control at will: there are people who can be roused into killing their neighbors, colleagues, friends, relatives'.³²

Conclusion

In essence, a legislation that was passed to protect Muslim sentiments became a weapon of revenge and violence in the hands of Islamists to eliminate free speech, social, religious and political differences in the name of Islam. The mere presence of the law, regardless of its contours, is discriminatory in nature, for it only talks about the protection of Islamic values while neglecting other beliefs. Moreover, a national identity 'bound up with an exclusive Sunni Islam is also problematic because it propels growing levels of political violence'.³³

Pakistan faces the dilemma of having a constitution that patronizes a particular sect of Muslim population that happens to be in majority while undermines diversity, free speech, tolerance, progression and liberal values which in process divides the masses along ideological lines. Religious fanaticism and militarism

in Pakistan have deepened to an extent that in the country's collective imagination, blasphemy is considered a crime that is an unpardonable offense and anyone who challenges it should also pay with their life.

Pakistani ruling elite's use of Islam as a political tool has nourished religious revivalism with Islamist groups justifying their militaristic values in the name of personal faith. Unless the state takes control of the ideological fronts that are dominated by Islamists in the country and replace it with a tolerant, diverse and progressive narrative of Islam, Pakistan's blasphemy law and its devastating impacts are here to stay. If Pakistan is to change the Blasphemy law and take on the Islamists mass public appeal, the country will have to clamp down on Islamist forces which continue to undermine religious diversity and liberal values in Pakistan.

Any such situation will only materialize when all aspects of the Islamist group's support base are isolated in the country. The first most critical step to achieve any such outcome will only take place when the country redefines the role of Islam and citizenship in the country's imagination as a state. The state needs to introduce a version of Islam in its national narrative that emphasizes on respecting and accepting all sorts of religious diversity in the country rather than just one strand of Islam which the country's majority of

population practices. Moreover, to purge the ideologies that continue to drive support for militant groups in Pakistan, the state needs to take control of the ideological frontiers of the country. The state needs to work on introducing a liberal and tolerant face of Islam.

The future of the Blasphemy law in Pakistan is directly linked with the question of how effectively the state reverses the deep rooted Islamization of the county. Unless the support base of Islamists in Pakistan is countered with an alternative nationalist Islamic version which can truly bring together the whole country, Pakistan's ideological polarization is expected to deepen and Islamist groups will continue to dominate Pakistan's ideological, cultural, social and political frontiers.

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