

### Islamism and masculinity: case study Pakistan

Aslam, Maleeha

Veröffentlichungsversion / Published Version

Zeitschriftenartikel / journal article

Zur Verfügung gestellt in Kooperation mit / provided in cooperation with:

GESIS - Leibniz-Institut für Sozialwissenschaften

#### Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:

Aslam, M. (2014). Islamism and masculinity: case study Pakistan. *Historical Social Research*, 39(3), 135-149. <https://doi.org/10.12759/hsr.39.2014.3.135-149>

#### Nutzungsbedingungen:

Dieser Text wird unter einer CC BY Lizenz (Namensnennung) zur Verfügung gestellt. Nähere Auskünfte zu den CC-Lizenzen finden Sie hier:

<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/deed.de>

#### Terms of use:

This document is made available under a CC BY Licence (Attribution). For more information see:

<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0>

---

# Islamism and Masculinity: Case Study Pakistan

Maleeha Aslam\*

---

**Abstract:** »Islamismus und Männlichkeit: Fallstudie zu Pakistan«. In Muslim societies, men use Islamism and its variants as means of self-actualization and directly in service of matters associated with personhood, masculinity, and particularly honor. This expressive trajectory i.e. exercising masculinity via Islamism holds true in Pakistan and can be broadly attributed to three elements. First, Pakistan's postcolonial baggage – a well-documented history of rise of Muslim nationalism, and Islamism in the subcontinent; second, western domination and interference in Pakistan's socio-economic and political domains (as in competition with Islamic heritage and governance frameworks) affecting some segments (and not all) among Muslim youth; and third, decades of authoritarian rule taking turns with weak democratic governments who have largely disappointed in terms of alleviating absolute to relative poverty, marginalization and alienation troubling Pakistani society. Pakistan's history and contemporary settings both reveal a dissonance between the prescribed, normative and idealized Muslim masculinity imperatives – and the socio-economic and political location of Pakistani men in the real world. Mostly leading dangerous, disenfranchised, and economically deprived lives it is difficult for them to uphold, for example, Quran's masculine imperative of being a *qawwam* or an ethnic normative of honor. Islamism becomes one such avenue that increases the possibility of self-assertion and actualization of masculinity imperatives and as they appear in religious and cultural texts, narratives and anecdotes – for instance the theme of *martyrdom*. The resulting death will not only be divine, but also *heroic*. In the presence of precedence i.e. in form of documented history highlighting *ji-hadism* – this becomes plausible and ultimately adds to individual and collective rationality among Muslims. To develop these ideas further, this article draws upon empirical data sets and historical archival records.

**Keywords:** Militant/jihadist Islamism, terrorism, masculinity, Pakistan.

---

## 1. Introduction

---

Whether masculinity is taken as a practice or a performance, or a normative construct (consult Butler 2006; Connell 2005) – it remains transformable and is negotiable. It needs mentioning, however, that expected changes are not sudden, but gradual. Through different time periods and cultures, militant and

---

\* Maleeha Aslam, Head Gender and Human Security/Research Fellow, Sustainable Development Policy Institute (SDPI), Islamabad, Pakistan; maleeha.aslam@gmail.com.

militarized masculinity is presented as some form of an ideal for example, *knight with the shining armour*, *the warrior king* and *the rebel leader* etc. Here the knight, warrior and rebel become the male archetype – and also a man’s best possible self-representation. The male archetype in Muslim cultures, including Pakistan, is at least partially similar. Pakistan’s militant Islamism is not a new phenomenon but predates the partition of India in 1947, where it appears to emerge as a subculture in response and reaction to the British rule. Pakistan’s historical context, its ethnic normativities, and the contemporary living contexts of its people, i.e. their socio-economic and political standing within and outside Pakistan – all continue to make militant masculinity meaningful causing escalation in militant or jihadist Islamism and vice versa. Unfortunately, these militant Islamists (regardless of whether one agrees or disagrees with their agenda), are always susceptible to getting subsumed under terrorist gangs operating worldwide as criminal networks or to kidnapping for ransom while having no tangible, or achievable political targets but only towering rhetoric.

---

## 2. Methodology and Sampling

---

This article is based on two major research studies conducted between 2003-2007 and 2009-2011.<sup>1</sup> Some of the ideas presented here have appeared in my book *Gender based explosions, the nexus between Muslim masculinities, jihadist Islamism and terrorism* (Aslam 2012).<sup>2</sup> The book explores gender and terrorism and its complex interplay with versions of Islamism that remains largely an under-researched area. The findings are based on archival and historical records preserved by the Government of Pakistan. The empirical research design of the study draws upon Connell’s theory of multiple masculinities. A total of 118 Pakistani Muslim men belonging to similar contexts and within the age bracket 18-40 were taken on board and classified as three stratified samples: low socio-economic group; socially stigmatized and distressed; and university students and professionals. The first group consisted of educated jobless persons who use secondary sources of income for basic survival, daily-wage

---

<sup>1</sup> Generous awards and grants received from Cambridge Commonwealth Trust; Cambridge Political Economy Society Trust; Prince Consort and Thirlwall Trust, Cambridge; Charles Wallace Trust Research Award, London; Smuts Memorial Fund at Cambridge, ORS – Universities UK; British Chevening, UK, and finally Japan Society for the Promotion of Science, Tokyo. I am genuinely grateful to all funders acknowledged here whose support made it possible for me to complete my PhD and Post Doctoral programme at Cambridge and the United Nations University, respectively.

<sup>2</sup> Published and released by United Nations University Press in 2012 receiving primary endorsements from Raewyn Connell (author of *Masculinities*, and University Chair, University of Sydney) and Akbar Ahmed (Ibn Khaldun Chair of Islamic Studies, American University, Washington DC).

labourers and non-commissioned government staff. The second group included substance misusers and internally displaced persons (IDPs) from Waziristan and Swat or those directly afflicted by floods, the war on terror and drone attacks. And the third group was comprised of bankers, commissioned government officials, development professionals and MA/PhD students from universities in Islamabad. Empirical findings of this small-scale pilot study are based on multiple sources of evidence (survey questionnaires, focus group discussions, interviews with religious scholars and academics, along with already established and published gender theory). Mainly qualitative in nature, quantitative data and analysis (multivariate regression analysis) was also used during research, however, those statistical data sets are not presented here.

---

### 3. Personhood, Masculine Honor and Jihadism

---

Honor is more a normative than a distant cultural ideal. Honor is not a value that only tribal or feudal cultures are obsessed with but is an integral component of the overall Pakistani personhood; their indivisible, individual selves. Almost Aristotelian, the Pakistani society views women as incidental and not absolute beings, i.e. not really individuals – ultimately placing the onus on men to show how honorable they and their families are. Men choose multiple sites to play out honor politics; at times using domestic violence against women in the name of honor and at times taking political violence as a possibility and means towards exerting, preserving or regaining subjective and collective (family/clan/national/transnational) “honor.” The studied sample described honor as a masculinity imperative mainly consisting of fearlessness, bravery, courage, independence, pride and arrogance, and the ability to take action and then stand by it regardless of the circumstances. A police constable during his interview shared: “A man must look forward – there is no option of looking sideways or backwards. Even when he faces death, he should face it with dignity and glory – not like a coward. We face death every day.”

The understanding of masculinity imperatives as already explained appears to be intense in those with tribal and rural affiliations. For example, Pukhtunwali, the self-representation, and customary code of living of the Pukhtuns, predate Islam, consisting of arbitration laws and tribal sets of living for the two genders. The Pukhtun nation, residing in Pakistan and Afghanistan, and Central Asia draw their identity from this code that is principally masculine, egocentric, and orientated towards revenge, and hospitality. The Taliban and Al Qaeda have misused this tenet and sought refuge in Pukhtun households who in the name of brotherhood and in respect of tradition did not deny hospitality.

In the first half of the twentieth century, Abdul Ghaffar Khan aka Badshah Khan – influenced by Gandhi’s non-violence, and Islam’s message of forgiveness – tried to promote non-violence among Pukhtuns through the *Khudai*

*Khidmatgar* (the red shirts) movement. However, his ideological tilt towards non-violence did not affect future Pukhtun generations. Even today, as also noted by Gilmore (Gilmore 1990, 221), manhood ideologies force men to defend their identity and to prevent any damage to it – a threat apparently worse than death. The culture makes weaponry an essential part of Pukhtun male identity. It is on the borders of Afghanistan and Pakistan that adolescent Pukhtun boys are expected to demonstrate their bravery and maturity and association with Pukhtunwali by participating in battles (Hawkins 2009, 17). Pukhtun tribes operate in a soldierly fashion and use war to display and safeguard personal, family and tribal honor.

Churchill, who fought against Pukhtuns wrote: “Every man was a warrior, politician and theologian and clans maintained their hostility and conflicts over generations” (Hawkins 2009). Participants of the research sample consisting of men from Swat and Waziristan who were affected by drone strikes and military action explained:

In order to understand the culture of revenge, we need to understand the concept of Pukhtunwali. [...] The way expectations are of me to take revenge [...] these expectations are not of my sister. She is after all just a woman. But I am required as a man to practically maintain our honor.

Revenge is part of masculine honor. Pakistani courts delay settlement and, of course, once matters go to court, the option of revenge is eliminated. Many times men prefer taking revenge to close a matter in a more acceptable [to family and/or community] manner.

An understanding of the local and tribal customary codes of conduct may reveal more about the mindset and making of jihadist or militant Islamists and/or terrorists than perhaps any other thing.

---

## 4. Islamism in Service of Muslim Masculinities

---

Men use Islamism and its variants as means of self-actualization and directly in service of matters associated with personhood, masculinity, and particularly honor. There are three substantive explanations that I present below in support of this argument. The analysis is seated in Pakistan’s history, its location in a globalized world, and its multifarious systemic decline.

### 4.1 Militant and Non-Militant Islamism and the Rise of Muslim Nationalism in the Subcontinent

Jihadist or militant Islamism, and rhetorical Islamism in contemporary Pakistan need to be located within the country’s postcolonial context and the rise of Muslim nationalism in pre-partition India. British rule redefined both gender and political identities of Indian Muslims in major ways. First, while interacting with both British men and women and competing against Hindus in the job

market, Muslim men began to realize that keeping Muslim women uneducated and domesticated would ultimately affect the principle political objective, that of freedom. Second, Pan-Islamism became the defining feature of Muslim political identity under colonial rule. Put differently, British rule allowed re-definition and renegotiation of both gender identities and political identities for Indian Muslims.

Having stated this, it needs to be mentioned here that gender norms and roles started to transform only gradually. Ahmed Khan's Mohammedan Anglo Oriental College at Aligarh (1877) and the All India Mohammedan Educational Conference aimed at men, not women. By 1906 Khan's followers made functional Aligarh Girls School which by 1937 became a degree college. It would not be incorrect to argue that the supposedly enlightened Muslim men, initially reserved for the male gender modern education; English clothing, mannerisms, and skills that were needed for the public domain such as the English language. While interacting with the British, Muslim men adopted western mannerisms and dress but women were denied integration into British customs. This peculiar gender ordering that reveals the double standards of a society full of contradictions is visible even today. Pakistani men wear business suits, and women traditional clothing with their heads covered.

Muslim masculinity was constructed as privileged, and was principally fashioned around objectives such as identity reassertion; anti-colonial resistance; religious revivalism through jihad and tabligh.<sup>3</sup> It is important to identify here the practices in Muslim masculinity under colonial rule. Mainly religious scholars, parties and movements dictated and *standardized* religion for Muslim men and women. If Ashraf Thanvi set standards for Muslim women through a book titled *Behishti Zevar* (i.e. *Ornaments of Paradise*), Mohammed Ilyas of the *Tablighi Jama'at* standardized religious practice mainly for men. Around the midst of the twentieth century *Jama'at-i Islami* politicized Muslims by making Sharia, jihad, and the notion of umma (i.e. collective, transnational Muslim identity) integral components of individual identity. Men spearheaded all such actions. They had taken these tasks upon themselves. These activities defined their contexts and out of these contexts emerged proactive Islamist masculinity.

Jihad was not restricted to militancy, but included journalistic, judicial, political and intellectual activism: there were for example periodicals such as Azad's *Al Hilal*, Muhammad Ali's *Comrade*, Zafar Ali Khan's *Zamindar*; Hali's *Musaddas* which served these objectives. Segments of Muslim men also participated in diplomacy and accordingly made attempts at redefining Muslim cultural ethic.

---

<sup>3</sup> Means to convey or deliver religious teachings.

Quite clearly, transnational Muslim identity was a man's project, that of Dr. Mohammed Iqbal. His poetry is mostly pan-Islamist and commemorative of Muslim rule. He generously used Persian and other Muslim languages to reach out to the Muslims beyond India. Muslim brotherhood and the associated sloganeering was a man's vision. The question arises: how did Islam become such a prominent theme in the Indian Muslim mindset?

Robinson (1998) maintains that two factors woke up Muslims of the subcontinent to their Muslim identity. The first being the nineteenth century Islamist revivalist movements beyond India, leading to the period of Balkan wars in 1911 to the abolition of the Turkish Caliphate in 1924; and second, the very Christian-aware colonial masters who were not only interested in proselytizing activities but also insisted on knowing about the religious identities of their subjects. The category Muslim became a major part of the discourse of the colonial state, and owing to the fact that the British had acquired power from the Muslims, suspicion between the two always remained. Muslims agitated against the British; there was, for example, the jihadi movement of the mujahidin of Saiyid Agmed Bareilwi in northern India, that of Saiyid Fadl Alawi in Malabar, and that of Haji Shariatullah in Bengal; there were the Deobandi and Ahl-i-Hadith movements in the later nineteenth century and those of *Tablighi Jama'at* and the *Jama' at-i Islami* in the twentieth. In archival records the British describe Muslims as *fanatics* and they did not hide their mistrust in regular correspondence. Sir Anthony Macdonnell wrote to Curzon in 1890s: "We are far more interested in [encouraging] a Hindu predominance than in [encouraging] a Mahomedan predominance, which, in the nature of things must be hostile to us" (Robinson 1998, 277). Here I argue that if suppression was imminent, attempts at identity preservation and reassertion were most expected. Viceroy Mayo questioned: "Are the Indian Musalmans bound by their Religion to rebel against the Queen?" (Robinson 1998, 277).

Muslim nationalism needed aggressive masculinity to be the hegemonic masculinity. This was particularly true for the province of Sindh where dividing lines between offenders and freedom fighters i.e. heroes of Islam and India was bound to blur. Leaders in their anti-colonial struggle used religious symbolism like jihad, umma (community), akhuwat (brotherhood), mainly to mobilize people.

In this regard, a case in point is the jihadism of Pir Pagaro of Khairpur (Sindh).<sup>4</sup> The first Pir Pagaro, Sibghatullah Shah was nominated as a successor by his father but his brothers attempted to kill him. Immediately a split in the disciples occurred and many of them vowed to follow the "one with the tur-

---

<sup>4</sup> Literally meaning: "a pir who wears a turban"- and thereby becomes a supreme spiritual leader. Please note that Pir Pagaro is a title held by the descendants of an eighteenth century sufi saint Pir Muhammad Rashid. Till today, there have been eight Pir Pagaros and many of them lived during the British Raj in India.

ban,” earning the title “Hur” as a “sacred distinction.” Following this, a few people were nominated as khalifas (deputies) who were mainly instrumental in organizing the *Hurs* into a brotherhood (Bacchal 1984, 31) an Islamic value. The *Hurs* swore by the Quran to remain faithful to their Pir. Pervez (Pervez 1984, 93) describes the scene:

The Pir called his scribe who handed him the Holy Book wrapped in silken cloth; all repeated bismillah [in the name of Allah]. Pir Pagaro standing on a platform laid the Quran on everyone’s head, who repeated that he would come whenever called, and [that] would give his life on his Pir’s demand.

The creation of a political pressure group with religious credentials is important to note. Pir Sibghatullah II wanted to put an end to colonialism and resorted to militant means. He trained and financed the *Hurs* for fighting against the British. The *Hurs* – noted as a criminal tribe by the British and literally labeled terrorists by Lambrick (1972), were called freedom fighters by the natives. Sindh became the site of active resistance and rebellion against the British. Ansari (1992) documents the rise of *Hurs* as a threatening independent power. The *Hurs* belonged to all social statuses and believed in a collective brotherhood; this belief was so strong that after plundering they would stop in villages with *Hur* inhabitants, armed and fearless, and not one would leak out this information to the British. Jaffery (1994: 453) records how *Hurs* made the British police go “berserk,” feeling deeply harassed. The Pir was finally imprisoned for eight years on charges of murder that could never be proved. Nonetheless he was ultimately hanged and secretly buried in 1943.

Unlike today, in the past it was difficult to imagine religious extremism in Muslim contexts. For the British, it remained difficult to ignore the religious fascist tendencies of this group. It was not until February 1917 that the Commissioner of Sindh argued against labeling “Hurs as a criminal tribe” and instead suggested using the phrase “fanatical sect” for them. It was difficult for the Commissioner to understand religion in India. He wrote:

For the Hurs the faith is a proselytizing faith and draws its adherents freshly from all tribes of the Musalman [Muslim] religion and from all strata of society [...] they may be regarded as the Mahomedan counterparts of the thugs.<sup>5</sup>

Throughout history, the *Hurs* have been considered as the martial people, fanatic fighters of Sindh and mostly devout adherents of Pir Pagaro:

They (were) famous for their swift and lightening action. Due to their blitzkrieg the British Empire was compelled to promulgate the first martial law [...]. The handful of *Hurs* defied the mighty trained British forces [...] [they] had organised even the suicide squads.<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>5</sup> NDC/S-162. 28-02-1917. Confidential letter; written to the collector of Thar and Parker by H S Lawrence, Commissioner of Sind, Judicial Department; Camp of Commissioner in Sind.

<sup>6</sup> NDC /S-180. 1973. A note prepared by Pir Bakhsh, the Superintendent of Police, Khairpur.



Official records note *Hurs* mutilating, and particularly castrating their victims mercilessly. The Deputy Superintendent Police, Muhammad Sharif reported Karam Illahi's murder in a letter dated December 27th, 1941: "He had 4-5 gun shots, 3-4 axe blows, his right hand and private organ had been cut, and badly mutilated."<sup>7</sup>

It is important to notice the indulgence of a group that otherwise claimed its devotion to religion in such de-gendering acts of violence on fellow Muslims. Such actions aimed at leaving the victim as a *lesser man*, on grounds that instead of joining *Hur jihadism*, he had chosen to either stay away or spy against it. Laiq, son of Sono Jamali of Hameer Jamali wrote a letter to the Deputy Superintendent of Police, Hyderabad, on 7th April 1945, noting that he and his fellow villagers felt insecure at the hand of *Hurs* and that they could be killed anytime.<sup>8</sup>

The British, while perceiving the *Hurs* as a criminal tribe, actually planned and thought that they could be eliminated: "If they (*Hurs*) are kept in a state of fear everywhere, the most immediate result would be that no new men will become *Hurs* [...] *Hurism* may fade and after all disappear."<sup>9</sup> Sindhi youth continues to draw inspiration from the *Hurs* as I discovered during my field-work in the village Umar-kanhar, Khairpur, Sindh.

## 4.2 Globalization, Islamism and Struggle for Autonomy

Western domination and interference in Pakistan's socio-economic and political domains (as in competition with Islamic culture, values, and governance frameworks) and its fallouts on the Muslim youth are many.

Globalization understood as development that makes international operation possible is in simple terms mostly projected as a pathway to universality and global integration. A deeper analysis introduces one to socio-cultural, economic and political costs that globalization entails. The global trade policies continue to affect subsistence farmers negatively. Free trade allows unwanted and substandard goods from the developed countries an easy entry into the markets of the developing world (for further information read Cancun talks, Doha round of talks etc.). A practice integral to globalization is the privatization of national assets that makes the cost of living unaffordable for the ordinary people. Economic geniuses Mahbub-ul Haq and Amartya Sen argued in favour of moral economy – but quite clearly, globalization patterns are still not pro poor. West-

---

<sup>7</sup> NDC S/194/17.

<sup>8</sup> NDC- S-221/21.

<sup>9</sup> NDC/S-162. 30-06-1914. Confidential letter No 497 of 1914 from W. H. Lucas Esquire, Commissioner in Sind, to Lord Willingdon of Ratton, Governor and President in Council Bombay; Judicial Department, Office of the Commissioner in Sind, Karachi. He informs about Sardar Muhammad Yakub, C. I. E, former District Magistrate, Thar and Parker reported to the Government on the working of the 'Criminal Tribes Act' dated July 1901.

ern liberal economic development frameworks are superimposed on local ways of living, working, household dynamics; they are overturning local gender norms and roles by hiring women as cheap labour in industry, and leaving men unemployed or promoting labour migration that ultimately only offers to them working long hours under highly exploitative working conditions.

Globalization and the introduction of western socio-economic liberal frameworks in postcolonial Muslim societies have certainly played a role in introducing religion-based ultra-conservatism, fundamentalism and orthodoxy in these populations. Globalization patterns deny justice and autonomy to local populations who become increasingly alienated from the systems within which they operate. Societies become more fragmented, i.e. those moving within western ideological frameworks are considered as very productive and useful for society as opposed to those who resist Western influence are immediately labeled as threats to society. The larger segment of population becomes increasingly isolated – labeled as *marginalized* in social sciences.

In recent years people in Pakistan have started adopting Saudi Wahhabi appearance, with men growing beards and wearing traditional clothing with skullcaps and women putting on the abaya (a long cloak), and niqaab. Considering Pakistan's socio-economic and political context, the research participants postulated a nexus between a crisis in social status and identity and the use of pronounced religious appearance and symbolism.

A participant described:

On becoming hopeless people try to find spiritual contentment through a source. Such a source is only the Divine. And then one notices sudden changes in people [...] growing a beard and wearing a skullcap, and becoming more and more inclined to religion Basically, he is trying to assign some value to himself by becoming very religious [...] so that people respect them.

The insanity of wealth-oriented global development gets a response in the form of counter narratives, standpoints and social movements. Populations start responding to global processes in historically and culturally distinct ways. Indigenous symbols are invoked during anti-globalization protests. In the case of Pakistan, these symbols are mostly religious, as the very creation of Pakistan is a result of rise of Muslim nationalism and the use of religious symbolism on the way. People question as to who are their legitimate leaders: those who serve western markets or those who would, for example, allow their own people more autonomy?

Worldwide, Muslim governments adopted secular western liberal economic frameworks. Largely, poverty remained unsolved. This failure of national governments to usher in an era of economic development through use of western liberal frameworks became the principle grounds on which demands for *reverting back to the original* (i.e. Islamic frameworks of socio-economic, political and legal development) were based.

### 4.3 Local Maladies, Crisis in Masculinity and Logic of Militant Islamism

Malik (1997) identifies three foundations of power in Pakistan: feudalism (landed and religious aristocracy), bureaucracy and military. One may add to this list *gender* as in Pakistani society a boy is born privileged and a girl under-privileged. Accordingly, if one were to review Malik's foundations of power in Pakistan, all three institutions immediately generate the contemporary male archetypes of a feudal lord, a warrior, and a bureaucrat who manages to oblige and draw favours in return. Governability crisis in Pakistan is mainly a result of power imbalances between these three foundations of power.

The military is a pervasive force with expanding professional and corporate interests encompassing the government, the economy and the society. Within cantonments army-run schools, hospitals, departmental stores and transportation provide standard to high-standard facilities for army families as opposed to substandard services that the civilian government provides for ordinary citizens. In response to the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan (1979) the Pakistan military and the US became principle trainers and financiers of jihadism in the region. Militancy increased and militarization of civilian spaces developed as an urban norm.

Pakistan's governance history reveals not only corruption and incompetence, but also flawed decision-making to the detriment of its own people. Many times the State of Pakistan has acted in hypermasculinized manner. Recently, in 2009, the government promulgated Nizam-i Adl Ordinance in Swat, ironically abdicating in favor of the Taliban precisely known for their anti-state activities in the country. By doing so the government allowed a criminal group with demonically totalitarian masculinity to take the throne – literally leaving Swat's civilians at the mercy of the Taliban. Unwittingly the government violated the social contract between itself and its law-abiding citizens and instead of immediately providing protection to the affected population the state further marginalized and alienated them. Finally the military was asked to step in and save Swat.

Even today, the state of Pakistan has no vision to offer to its citizens and is incapable of handling a Wahhabi-affected population while nipping out militant and terrorist elements from the country. Owing to conflict, people have lost their net financial assets (NFAs), and sources of income. Unemployment affects income – but conflict destroys savings and NFAs generating wide scale insecurities in the affected populations.

The research sample of men belonging to Waziristan and Swat elaborated on the self-prestige issues war and displacement generate. They suffered from occupational and status inequalities and regularly tolerated discrimination, bias and prejudice in other parts of Pakistan as everyone perceived them as Taliban or Al-Qaeda accomplices and not as ordinary conflict-affected civilians. It

should not be surprising if this emerging *underclass* in Pakistan – alienated from the mainstream, develops its own *subculture*, and opts for *violence*. Poverty affects women and men differently. In Pakistan, unlike women, men have an allocated/assigned gender role of being financial providers for their nucleus and extended families. Poverty puts masculinity in crisis. A few relevant quotes from the research sample are provided below:

A man is upset about everything: employment, expenses, poverty and domestic environment. He suffers in times of poverty, when life is unaffordable.

Men have to put on a façade and keep that illusion of financial stability alive [...] even if they are not stable, particularly if they are displaced.

Relatives target unemployed men. We know that the whole [governance] system has failed in this country [...] but it is one individual man who is made answerable and accountable for failing to earn. A man feels totally victimized under such circumstances, and he is helpless.

They are offered huge sums of money and given access to a wide range of resources [...]. This is how they become terrorists. We can blame the outside elements or forces for misguiding our youth into terrorism but the fact of the matter is that [pause] what environment has Pakistan provided them? Poverty, illiteracy, hunger, joblessness – what else?

Poverty [...] curtails people's sense of judgment. Unemployment is a huge pressure and that makes individuals join so-called jihadi organizations. Most men accept offers of jihad as the organizations take responsibility for their families and welfare. They are given money. Men say [...] why not take this money for food?

According to research participants, the affluent Muslim youth living in the West feel socio-political marginalization, even if they are financially stable. Therefore, they may opt for militant Islamism and/or terrorism. The sample opined that at times merely a need to gain fame may generate similar interests among the rich.

Force can be used due to personal attitudinal problems, the disturbed internal logic of individuals and their view of society, and at times substantive socio-economic factors existing in an individual's overall context. Deeply frustrated individuals can inflict harm on both themselves and others, and the same holds true for Pakistani men who within a constraining and compulsive socio-economic context try to salvage what is left of their masculinity.

Opinions on the issue provided by the sample illustrate the point further:

It is natural for any young man to go for something that provides a quick and easy fix. He will go for anything that serves his interest whether it is right or wrong. His interest is money, respect, honor and power.

Pakistani men have an imprint in their psychology. 'If I am a real man [...] I can make anything possible.' [...] The fact is that he cannot do anything because of the circumstances surrounding him. When he fails, he starts indulging in whatever else is possible for him [...] be it smoking, theft crime, murder etc. Once they start indulging in something, they go right to the end as then it becomes a test of their manhood. They never quit halfway as that makes them *na-mard* [eunuch].

When unemployed men with multiple inadequacies get together, they get re-organized as a gang and go around snatching mobiles and indulging in other street crimes. At times, they are picked up by other crime networks, even terrorist networks, and are paid money to commit certain actions. The men start feeling as if they have found employment and success. Their actions serve their male ego.

The research sample insisted that the current use of jihad is in contradiction to Islamic values where jihad is faith-based and in way of Allah. A participant noted:

Suicide bombing or bombing – the type we are witnessing today is all terrorism [...] and not jihad. It is very simple to differentiate between the two. Jihad is not a job: you bomb that place and I give you this much money. But men are taking it like a job. They do this for money. A jihadi is supposed to be very humble. He does not boast that I am better than you. He fights against oppression and injustice. Our men are telling everyone that they are better than others. This is pride and arrogance. This is not jihad. This is terrorism.

---

## 5. The Great Disconnect: Locating Islamic and Customary Gender Norms in the Real World

---

Research participants emphasized that cultural preferences demand that men be financial providers and guarantors of individual/collective honor and that Islamic texts and narratives cement this assigning of gender roles even further. The most prominent gender role assigned, and perhaps the most discussed by Western and Muslim feminists alike, is that of men made *qawwam* (custodian) over women. The Quran informs us: “al-rijal qawwamun ‘ala al-nisa [...]” or “men are qawwamun (custodian) in relation to women [...]” (4:34). Islamic scholars interviewed during research insisted that this Divine-assigned masculine role of *qawwam* or *qawwamun* does not make men guards but guardians for women and responsible for their overall socio-economic and emotional welfare. A Muslim man is under religious obligation to take care of his wife/wives by virtue of being her/their *qawwam*. As a true follower of Islam, a man is expected to keep his family well fed and comfortable: a man who has the character and the strength to earn *qasb halal* (legitimate livelihood) for the support of his family. Divorce does not alter any arrangement and men must continue providing maintenance to former wife/wives according to court orders.

Islamic sacred texts do not present the female body as weak and make references to the trials of childbirth. A woman completes her cultural (not quite religious) obligation by giving birth. Islam does not make it her duty to feed the child. The Quran allows a wife to take money from her husband if she feeds the child. A research participant from among the professional men alerted:

In other words, Islam clearly conveys to Muslim men that she has special rights and privileges over him – whether he likes it or not. In fact, this mother-

child example is a very extreme example but this tells a man his right place. Basically he is told not to expect anything from anyone [...] not even from his wife feeding his children for free.

Although women *can* procreate – reproduction does not appear as a Divine-assigned feminine role for Muslim women. In fact, the Quran notes infertility as a trial from God.

The research participants insisted that if Islam was in any way rigorous or gender-biased, it was so against men. Men struggled to convey their desperation where a religion imposes on them economic and family duties that they cannot easily fulfill in contemporary Muslim societies. A quote in point:

The issue is that he is made responsible for women. Both religion [Islam] and Pakistani culture have made him accountable. In the real world, he does not have the sources of production [...] of income, and he does not have that security through which he can confidently act responsible for the welfare of his women. Then he gets frustrated and begins to act in manners that are totally unacceptable.

Similarly, jihad in the battlefield, if required, is termed obligatory for men but not for women. The hardship of battle and jihad is made obligatory for men considering their physical attributes, and women are exempted from all confrontational forms. Martyrdom is what brave men are believed to aspire.

We know that martyr is the highest rank in Islam. Any man would act in this way with the hope of achieving glory and pride. Our men are exploited in the name of jihad etc. Promises of heaven are made to them. We cannot see what happens to them in the hereafter, but one can assume that they probably never go to paradise. Who can [...] after killing innocent people? They go for the charm of martyrdom.

Across stratified research samples that I investigated, respect and honor appear as central themes in the articulation of masculinity and manhood. Evidence shows that anything involving action, war, militancy and rebellion has a certain masculine charm for Pakistani men, as most perceive it as somewhat heroic, even if fallacious.

---

## 6. Discussion

---

Political analysts, for example, Sageman (2009), and Shapiro and Fair (2009) have questioned the assumed link between poverty on one hand, and terrorism and/or militancy on the other. Although my research does not build a case for such a supposition as a discernible symbiotic relationship between poverty and terrorism – neither does it support an argument for delinking poverty from militancy and/or terrorism.

My research findings lead me to figure that one of the most prominent themes of causes of militant Islamism and/or terrorism remains poverty. As

indicated throughout this paper, relative poverty is not restricted to money but is more complex and includes issues of marginalization, alienation, prejudice, bias, discrimination, stereotyping, profiling and so forth. For example, apparently very rich individuals may feel terribly inferior and disadvantaged in a globalized world due to their identity. According to social theory, considering poverty as a money matter is incorrect and erroneous. Sociologists and development theorists must prevent political sciences from attempting to delink poverty from violence (be it in any form).

Having stated this, my comprehension of the issue is that coherence is needed between religious and cultural masculinity imperatives and the socio-economic context within which masculinities are produced. However, in the case of Pakistan, socio-economic expectations of men are high and the socio-economic context of the country is deplorable. Issues of self-actualization and feelings of inadequacy often caused by unemployment affect masculine practices in a negative manner. Among Muslim communities, where men are supposed to be *qawwam* of their household, poverty jeopardizes masculine honor at a subjective and somewhat communal level. The affected man makes attempts to regain his position in the appropriate gender order through acts of violence that are culturally perceived as normative performances of the masculine.

---

## 7. Conclusion

---

For the Pakistani youth, living in contemporary Pakistan in a globalized world is not very different from living under the colonial masters. Issues remain the same: joblessness, religious profiling and associated disadvantages in a competitive environment – ultimately generating identity anxiety, class-based society and lack of autonomy. Interestingly, trends in religious revivalism in and around the subcontinent, particularly those in the Middle East have intensified and along with it sentiments of Pan-Islamism, also known as transnational Islamism. Religious ideological exchanges that were not convenient under the British raj – are now freely floating in a digital world. Militant or Jihadist Islamism and other forms of proactive Islamism exist in the documented history of the region and help Muslim youth rationalize their actions today. One may step into the domain of militant jihadist Islamism or into the domain of terrorism – but gender issues crosscut both. In my analysis it is men's articulation of their personhood, principally mediated by religious and cultural masculine imperatives that are animated through Islamism.

---

## References

---

- Ansari, Sarah F. D. 1992. *Sufi saints and state power: The Pirs of Sind, 1843-1947*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Aslam, Maleeha. 2012. *Gender based explosions: The nexus between Muslim masculinities, jihadist Islamism and terrorism*. New York: United Nations University Press.
- Bacchal's District Gazetteer*. 1984. Khairpur, Karachi: Sindh Government Press.
- Butler, Judith. 2006 [1999]. *Gender trouble: Feminism and the subversion of identity*. New York: Routledge.
- Connell, Robert W. 2005. *Masculinities*, 2nd ed. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Gilmore, David D. 1990. *Manhood in the making: Cultural concepts of masculinity*. New Haven, CT and London: Yale University Press.
- Hawkins, Jonathan. 2009. The Pashtun cultural code: Pashtunwali. *Australian Defence Force Journal* 180, 16-27.
- Jaffery, A. A. 1994. *Pakistan key Siyyasi Waderay*. Karachi: Book Makers.
- Lambrick, Hugh T. 1972. *The terrorist*. London: Ernest Benn.
- Malik, Iftikhar H. 2005. *Jihad, Hindutva and the Taliban: South Asia at the crossroads*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Malik, Iftikhar H. 1997. *State and civil society in Pakistan: Politics of authority, ideology and ethnicity*. Basingstoke: Macmillan.
- NDC/S-162: Pir Pagaro and the Hurs: Selections from Hyderabad Records (Special Branch) Vol. I 1914-23. Islamabad: Federal Government of Pakistan. [Source: National Documentation Center (NDC), Cabinet Division, Government of Pakistan, Islamabad.]
- NDC/S-180: (Secret) Selections from the Records of the Deputy Commissioner, Khairpur, Pir Pagaro and the Hurs Vol. III. Islamabad: Federal Government of Pakistan. [Source: National Documentation Center (NDC), Cabinet Division, Government of Pakistan, Islamabad.]
- NDC/S/194/17: Pir Pagaro and the Hurs. Islamabad: Federal Government of Pakistan. [Source: National Documentation Center (NDC), Cabinet Division, Government of Pakistan, Islamabad.]
- NDC/S-221/21: Protection of Witnesses and Other Zamindars in Danger in Cases against Hurs and Pir Pagaro / Grant of Rewards. Islamabad: Federal Government of Pakistan. [Source: National Documentation Center (NDC), Cabinet Division, Government of Pakistan, Islamabad.]
- Pervez, Ikram-ul-Haque. 1984. *The contribution of Sindhi Muslim in Pakistan movement*. Jamshoro: Institute of Sindhology.
- Robinson, Francis. 1998. The British Empire and Muslim identity in South Asia. In *Transaction of the Royal Historical Society*, 6th series, vol. 8, 271-89.
- Sageman, Marc. 2009. *Leaderless jihad: Terror networks in the twenty-first century*. New Delhi and Philadelphia, PA: Manas Publications/University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Shapiro Jacob N., and Christine Fair. 2009. *Why support Islamist militancy? Evidence from Pakistan* <[http://www.princeton.edu/~jns/papers/Shapiro\\_Fair\\_2009\\_Why\\_Support\\_Islamist\\_Militancy.pdf](http://www.princeton.edu/~jns/papers/Shapiro_Fair_2009_Why_Support_Islamist_Militancy.pdf)> (accessed January 19, 2014).