



Radical Muslim Politics from Comparative Perspective: Theological Deprivation as the Major Source of Hizb ut- Tahrir's Influence

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Abstract

This study is a comparative qualitative analysis of radical Muslim politics. It focuses on the transnational anti-systemic and anti-democracy Hizb ut-Tahrir (hereinafter referred to as HT) that aims to establish a global Muslim state called Caliphate by non-violence means. HT takes advantage of socio-economic and political deprivations, marginalization, Islamophobia, social exclusion, authoritarian political structures, repression, political opportunity structures, and Western foreign policies towards the Muslim world. But our analysis of three countries (Britain, Uzbekistan and Egypt) has shown that these factors alone cannot explain why HT is influential in some countries but not in some others where these disadvantages as far as the Muslim youth are concerned also exist. Our comparative analysis of the three cases suggests that theological deprivation is the major factor that paves the way for radicalization of the Muslim youth when socio-economic and political deprivations already exist.

Keywords: Muslim Politics, Radicalism, Hizb ut-Tahrir, Deprivation, Britain, Uzbekistan, Egypt

INTRODUCTION

This study is a comparative qualitative analysis of radical Muslim politics. It focuses on the transnational anti-systemic and anti-democracy Hizb ut-Tahrir (Party of Liberation, hereinafter referred to as HT) that aims to establish a global Muslim state called Caliphate by non-violence means. The HT has shunned violence so far, but its critics have argued that its radical, extremist, exclusivist rhetoric works a kind of conveyor belt to pro-violence ideologies and groups, even though no evidence to substantiate these claims have been so far presented. HT mainly appeals to the youth. Thus this paper looks at the factors that pave the way for the youth attraction to HT's ideology. Based on the literature on HT, we look at factors such as socio-economic deprivation and

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political deprivation. Linked to these, we will also look briefly at related phenomena –based on the context- alienation, marginalization, Islamophobia, social exclusion, authoritarian political structures, repression, political opportunity structures, and Western foreign policies towards the Muslim world. Another important factor that this study will analyse is theological deprivation. We argue that theological deprivation is the major factor that helps HT flourish and widen its membership.

To test our argument, we will analyse three different countries: Britain, Uzbekistan and Egypt. The reasons these countries have been selected as follow. Britain and Uzbekistan are known to have many members of the HT and HT is very active and visible in these countries. While it is banned in Uzbekistan and in many European countries, it operates legally in Britain. Having Britain in this study will help us to see if repression is really the root cause of HT's radical and extremist ideology's appeal to the deprived and disgruntled youth. What Britain and Uzbekistan have in common is the theological deprivation that the Muslim youth in these two countries suffer from whereas in Egypt there is no such a problem even though socio-economic and political (as far as Islamist opposition is concerned) deprivations are mundane realities of daily life. Thus, Egypt in our study works as a test case to see if theological deprivation is the major factor of HT's wide appeal and influence.

We now start with a short description of HT's ideology and politics, based mainly on HT's official primary sources.

HIZB UT-TAHRIR POLITICS

HT's official website states that it is a global Islamic political party that was established in 1953 under the leadership of its founder, Taqiuddin an-Nabhani. The website also declares that HT global leadership is currently headed by Ata' Abu Rashta. In the Muslim world, HT works at all levels of society with an aim to bring the Muslims back to living an Islamic way of life in the Khilafah (Caliphate) State following an exclusively political method.¹ HT argues that:

oppression of Muslims and occupation of Muslim lands by colonialists have gotten worse and worse ever since the destruction of the leadership and state that represented the Muslim Ummah, the Khilafah. This occurred over a long period but finally culminated in the abolition of the Khilafah on the 3rd March 1924 – a policy instigated by the British. Until this time the Muslim world had a leader; its shield and some dignity. Even at its weakest period, the Ummah was stronger and more formidable than after the abolition of the Khilafah. After the destruction of the Khilafah the Muslim Ummah came to be led by corrupt kings and dictators and so

¹ Hizb ut-Tahrir Britain, *A Positive Agenda for Muslims in Britain*, (London: HT Britain, 2009), p. 5, available at http://www.hizb.org.uk/hizb/images/PDFs/Agenda_for_Muslims.pdf last visited on 10 March 2010. HT's understanding of the Caliphate is decidedly ahistorical. The Caliphate as a single entity under the command of a caliph who receives obedience from all and has religious authority has not existed at least since 850 AD, ICG (International Crisis Group), 'Radical Islam in Central Asia: Responding to Hizb ut-Tahrir', ICG Report 58, (Osh/Brussels: ICG, 2003), p. 4.

called democrats. They plunged the people into oppression and injustice and did everything to facilitate the West's colonial agenda in the Muslim world.²

Even though, its aim is to establish a caliphate state in the Muslim lands, it strongly refuses that they are trying to change the system of government in the West. The official website of HT puts that:

The party... works to project a positive image of Islam to Western society and engages in dialogue with Western thinkers, policymakers and academics. Western governments, under the banner of the War on Terror, are currently working to present Islam as an 'evil ideology'. Indeed at the heart of this campaign is to malign the Islamic ideology as an alternative to Western liberal capitalism.³

HT denounces democracy and is clearly against human law-making:

(L)egislation in Islam is for Allah alone. In a democracy it is for people and parliament. Hence, it is forbidden for Muslims to vote and participate in the parliamentary process. It is also forbidden from Islam to take up or support an executive officer who undertakes executive or ruling actions that contradict Islam. Furthermore, the support for secular political parties is haram [prohibited, Y] for this would be to support a group which holds principles directly contradicting Islam. Furthermore were we to adopt this, our community would simply become divided on party lines, weakening us further. Assimilating Muslims into secular party politics simply subverts our community's priorities to those of the particular party.⁴

HT conveys its message in simple terms. It mainly focuses on poverty and inequality which will be addressed once corrupt governments are replaced with the rule of Shari'a. HT's call for social justice strikes a chord with many people who live in deprivation. HT members are proactive in getting their message across by initiating contacts with local media and offering interviews and information.⁵

HT thrives in closed authoritarian and totalitarian political systems, where there is little room for opposition and participation in politics is not allowed.⁶ Members give many reasons for joining HT and there is no single issue. However, there is often a psychological response related to deprivation, marginalization, alienation from the wider society, loss of social status, lack of belief in the future and the system, and a desire to 'do something'.⁷ Many members are in deprivation, but more important is their perception of receiving a bad deal from society and the state.⁸ The HT's modern (and Marxist) language

² Hizb ut-Tahrir Britain, *A Positive Agenda for Muslims in Britain*, p. 20.

³ *Ibid*, p. 5.

⁴ *Ibid*, p. 9.

⁵ Saule Mukhametrakhimova, *Dealing with Hizb ut-Tahrir*, RCA, No. 452, 16 June 06.

⁶ ICG, *Radical Islam in Central Asia: Responding to Hizb ut-Tahrir*, p. 41.

⁷ *Ibid*, p. 14.

⁸ *Ibid*, p. 15.

is attractive to these young, secularized men than the complex religious formulas of the more traditional religious scholars.⁹

HT uses leaflets and the Internet for promotion of its ideology, and email and face-to-face meetings for command and control. Leaflets, communiqués and press releases published by the group are all published in the same format and with the same type of wording. HT is not populist; it is elitist.¹⁰

Although the party claims to work in the sphere of ideas, it is not an intellectual movement. Most members are reasonably well educated, but with only limited inclination to read major theoretical works on Islamic concepts. Much of the education many receive come orally from their teachers, and their discussions are fairly simplistic. Thus, most members show no interest in real discussion of their ideas.¹¹

HIZB UT-TAHRIR IN BRITAIN

HT operates at two levels in Britain: clandestinely, recruiting mostly among students, and to a small extent on the street; and through its communications modes, such as its web-based journal *Khilafah* and its communiqués.¹² Now that it is barred from many mosques, its main vehicle for recruitment is through Islamic study circles. These regularly meet at members' homes or community centers. Generally, five or so aspirant members meet under the supervision of an experienced member. Indoctrination period usually lasts for up to two years, and then the member is accepted into the organization. Senior members' and correspondents' email addresses are listed in *Khilafah*, and they actively seek media interviews.¹³

HT's recruitment efforts benefit from discrimination against Muslims and from the unfulfilled expectations of Muslim migrants, who often see the functioning of their host societies as 'unjust'.¹⁴ HT is known to target frustrated youth who have lost faith in their home country's 'system'.¹⁵ One of the major reasons of losing faith in the system and wider society is Islamophobia which has materialized due to the portrayal of Islam and Muslims as the national 'Other', where exclusion and discrimination occur on the basis of their religion and civilization which differs with national tradition and identity. Disaffection, disenfranchisement and isolation are functions of both poorer and richer

⁹ *Ibid*, p. 16.

¹⁰ Michael Whine, 'Hizb ut-Tahrir in Open Societies', Zeyno Baran (ed) *The Challenge of Hizb ut-Tahrir: Deciphering and Combating Radical Islamist Ideology*, (Washington DC: The Nixon Center, 2004), pp. 99-109, p. 101.

¹¹ ICG, 'Radical Islam in Central Asia: Responding to Hizb ut-Tahrir', p. 27.

¹² Whine, 'Hizb ut-Tahrir in Open Societies', p. 101.

¹³ *Ibid*.

¹⁴ Zeyno Baran, *Hizb ut-Tahrir: Islam's Political Insurgency*, (Washington DC, Nixon Center, 2004), p. 131.

¹⁵ Madeleine Gruen, 'Demographics and Methods of Recruitment', in Zeyno Baran, *The Challenge of Hizb ut-Tahrir: Deciphering and Combating Radical Islamist Ideology*, (Washington DC, Nixon Center, 2004)pp. 116-123, p. 116

Muslims, and are adequate to lead either into radicalization.¹⁶ Against the backdrop of social alienation and internal disorder, 'Islam has become a template for the culturally confused, a language of protest for the politically frustrated.'¹⁷ The media generally highlight the extreme views of a tiny minority of individuals which make headlines but which are damaging community relations, and increasingly contributing to the feeling of insecurity among British Muslims.¹⁸ Very little progress has been made in tackling Islamophobia in the United Kingdom since it was brought into focus by the Commission on British Muslims and Islamophobia in its report published in 1997.¹⁹ Muslims living in the United Kingdom strongly feel that the government has done little to discharge its responsibilities under international law to protect its Muslim citizens and residents from discrimination, vilification, harassment, and deprivation. The legal framework required to articulate standards of behavior and to bring about a cohesive society remains as inadequate as it was when the report was published by the Commission in 1997.²⁰ Even local authorities which in other respects were at the forefront of implementing race equality legislation, for example Brent, subsumed Muslims under the blanket category of 'Asians'. They were insensitive and unresponsive, in consequence, to distinctive Muslim concerns. A third of all British Muslims are not Asians and a half of all Asians are not Muslims. The insensitivity was – and is – particularly serious in relation to the provision and delivery of services.²¹ Criminal laws such as the Terrorism Act 2000 and the Anti-Terrorism Crime Security Act 2001 have helped to create a climate of fear. They have led to the internment in the UK of Muslim men, respectable charities having their funds seized, and charities suffering because Muslims are reluctant to donate money for fear of being accused of funding 'terrorists'.²²

Since 9/11 and 7/7 the civil liberties of citizens have been eroded. Already generally excluded, disadvantaged, alienated, misrepresented and vilified, in the current period Muslim minorities are further thrust into the limelight in negative terms. "Home-grown" radicalization is a phenomenon that has emerged through reversion to a monocultural politico-ideological project that came as a response to the 2001 urban disturbances in the North of the UK and the events of 9/11 in the USA. This has significantly impacted on civil liberties as well as providing a blame-the-victim approach propagated by dominant media and political discourses.²³

¹⁶ Abbas Tahir, 'Muslim Minorities in Britain: Integration, Multiculturalism and Radicalism in the Post-7/7 Period', *Journal of Intercultural Studies*, Vol. 28, No. 3, 2007, pp. 287-300, p. 296.

¹⁷ Caryle Murphy, *Passion for Islam* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2002), p. 276

¹⁸ Muhammad Anwar, 'Muslims in Western States: The British Experience and the Way Forward', *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, Vol. 28, No. 1, 2008, pp. 125-137, p. 133.

¹⁹ *Islamophobia Issues, Challenges and Action: A Report by the Commission on British Muslims and Islamophobia*, (Stoke on Trent, UK: Trentham Books, 2004), p. 8.

²⁰ Statement by the Muslim Council of Britain, November 2003 quoted in *Islamophobia. Issues, Challenges and Action*, p. 3.

²¹ *Ibid*, p.13.

²² *Ibid*, p.7.

²³ Abbas, 'Muslim Minorities in Britain: Integration, Multiculturalism and Radicalism in the Post-7/7 Period', p. 288

In the West, both political Islamist groups and white ethno-nationalists focus their efforts on young men between the approximate ages of 16 and 22. They have carefully studied the interests of this demographic and have found that much of their time is spent online in chat groups, game-related sites and music-related sites where they can either download music or chat about a particular band. Most of their online activities revolve around interaction with others who share similar interests.²⁴ One reason why other groups with similar goals seem unable to amass the same degree of international support is that HT adapts its message to appeal to the desires of the populations it is trying to impress. In Europe, where Muslim populations often feel marginalized, HT has positioned itself as a political advocate.²⁵

Many young inner-city-British-born Muslims are disconnected and disgruntled.²⁶ This has as much to do with the working of government policies in the inner cities as it has to do with the ineffectiveness and the lack of resourcefulness of Muslim communities, particularly in the north of England.²⁷ They lack social, cultural and economic opportunities, while disengaged from the political process. They cannot always connect with rural-born uneducated leaders and elders whose attention is on matters elsewhere.²⁸

Mosques and imams have underserved their communities. Thus, young Muslims have subsequently gone on to form their own study circles, use the Internet to access alternative sources of information and utilize modes of communication familiar to them, that is, the English language. The already marginalized and predisposed are particularly vulnerable to negative external influences when all else has failed them internally.²⁹ However, given that many of them lack a strong understanding of theology, and that the communities in which they live lack a proper social and theological infrastructure, many are left to self-declared spiritual leaders, who provide them with a quick fix for their identity crises while pushing them slowly towards radicalism.³⁰

In general, local Islamic institutions are not fit for purpose. Young people have the ability to download problematic *fatwas* from websites, with the medium of English used to communicate fanatic ideals with much effect.³¹ There are numerous social scientists and humanities experts but one cannot easily count on one hand the number of high-profile Muslim theologians who could be

²⁴ Gruen, 'Demographics and Methods of Recruitment', p. 116.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 122.

²⁶ Tahir Abbas, 'British Muslim Minorities Today: Challenges and Opportunities to Europeanism, Multiculturalism and Islamism', *Sociology Compass*, Vol. 1, No. 2, 2007, pp. 720–736, p.731.

²⁷ Tahir Abbas, 'Ethno-Religious Identities and Islamic Political Radicalism in the UK: A Case Study', *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, Vol. 27, No. 3, 2007, pp. 429 - 442 p. 437.

²⁸ Abbas, 'British Muslim Minorities Today: Challenges and Opportunities to Europeanism, Multiculturalism and Islamism', p.731.

²⁹ Abbas, 'Muslim Minorities in Britain: Integration, Multiculturalism and Radicalism in the Post-7/7 Period', p. 297.

³⁰ Baran, *Hizb ut-Tahrir: Islam's Political Insurgency*, p. 59.

³¹ Abbas, 'British Muslim Minorities Today: Challenges and Opportunities to Europeanism, Multiculturalism and Islamism', p.724.

regarded as notable.³² Majority of ulama are imported from Pakistan, but few could be judged 'sophisticated scholars of Islamic law and exegetes of the Qur'an'. The social status of the majority of mosque imams is modest, whether in Pakistan or in Britain.³³ Negative perceptions are the staple of many Muslim websites, commenting that teaching methods of imams are characterized by 'the stick not love'.³⁴ For second and third generation Muslims living in the West, many of whom do not speak Arabic, HT's easily accessible literature (in PDF format on HT websites) provides an alternative source of political and historical information and theological interpretation. These Muslims often complain their only source of information about Islam is books written by Western specialists, the 'Orientalists'. HT fills this void with its own interpretation of religion and world events, thus purportedly raising the consciousness of these and other Muslims. Party leaflets, emulating a tactic used by Marxist-Leninist groups during the Cold War, will usually convey three concepts: a statement of the party's mission, a detailed expression of its position on current political issues, and a call for recruitment. The leaflets in English are unusually well written and indicate a good understanding of global affairs. These leaflets, accessible over the Internet in various languages, provide the *Ummah* with timely and coherent explanations of current events in a way that fits HT's framework. The party also diligently recruits on college campuses in open societies.³⁵

International ideas and events influence the Muslim political mind in Britain for better or for worse.³⁶ There is little doubt that the military interventions led by the U.S. in Afghanistan and Iraq have bolstered anti-Western sentiment, not just among radical Muslims, but in the wider Muslim community as well. There is little trust in Western motives, and this is clearly seen in the attitudes of HT to international organizations and Western states. The HT's literature has always expressed deep skepticism and antipathy towards the West. Much of it has been focused on Israel, European subjugation of Arab lands, and what is seen as the West's immoral political and economic system. Leaflets include much more.³⁷ Chatham House claimed directly after 7/7 that the war in Iraq made the UK a target and many within the UK security services often express their exasperation for having to pay for mistakes in the British foreign policy.³⁸ The difficulty in situating UK foreign policy within an account of the radicalization towards violence of some British Muslims, as a means of objectively assessing how it has or has not contributed to that radicalization, pervades many of the analyses

³² *Ibid*, p. 731.

³³ Philip Lewis, 'Imams, Ulema and Sufis: Providers of Bridging Social Capital for British Pakistanis?', *Contemporary South Asia*, Vol. 15, No. 3, 2006, pp.273-287, p. 274.

³⁴ *Ibid*, p. 276.

³⁵ Baran, *Hizb ut-Tahrir: Islam's Political Insurgency*, pp. 20-31.

³⁶ Liat Radcliffe, 'A Muslim Lobby at Whitehall? Examining the Role of the Muslim Minority in British Foreign Policy Making', *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations*, Vol. 15, No. 3, 2004, pp. 365-386, p. 370.

³⁷ ICG, *Radical Islam in Central Asia: Responding to Hizb ut-Tahrir*, p. 39.

³⁸ H. A. Hellyer, 'Engaging British Muslim Communities in Counter-Terrorism Strategies', *The RUSI Journal*, Vol. 153, No. 2, 2008, pp. 8-13, p. 12.

that followed the London attacks. The issue of foreign policy is raised and its central importance is underlined, but little if any account is offered of its relationship with Muslim youth's radicalization. Instead, the need for 'integration' is reiterated.³⁹ But it is never carefully analyzed that since the Rushdie affair, a series of other crises has disrupted any processes of integration into Britain and induced a sense of widening alienation among the Muslim youth. The Gulf War, Bosnia, Palestine, Kashmir, Chechnya, September 11, the nuclear confrontation between India and Pakistan, the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, have all mobilized Muslim youth on to the streets of Britain.⁴⁰ Since the establishment of Israel in 1948 the fate of the Palestinian people has occupied a central place in Muslim politics. For mainstream Muslims, the status, suffering and future of the Palestinian people have been an important focal point. However, for the Islamist movement, the experience of the Palestinians has served a different, and more important, purpose for the failure of the international community to affect a resolution of the Palestinian claim has provided a recruitment tool for the extremists.⁴¹ Other than the Palestinians, Muslims in Britain identify deeply also with the plight of Bosnians, Kashmiris, Afghans or Iraqis, seeing the West as an oppressor. The result has been that rather than peaceful integration, the Muslim diaspora community in Britain has had to lurch from one traumatic crisis to another.⁴²

The U.S. (and the UK) in many quarters is no longer seen as a just and moral power.⁴³ While the U.S. and the UK have so far not advanced any convincing arguments for either their invasion of Iraq or their subsequent management of the occupation, HT for its part has built a strong ideological case.⁴⁴ HT members believe contemporary international politics is being dominated by U.S. efforts to wage a 'fourth crusade' against Muslims. Islamists were galvanized by President Bush's reference to the war on terrorism as a 'crusade' in September 2001. Similarly, when he declared that 'you are either with us or against us', HT inferred from this comment and subsequently conveyed to its grassroots elements that Bush meant 'You are either with Western civilization and democracy, or Islamic civilization.'⁴⁵ It must be noted that anti-Muslim and pro-Israeli Christian fundamentalist rhetoric and its influence in US politics have not been helpful.

To sum up, British Muslim youth experience a sense of dislocation and alienation, perceived or real, which negatively affects their outlook. These experiences encourage some to seek to "resolve" Muslim issues, both at home

³⁹ Shane Brighton, 'British Muslims, Multiculturalism and UK Foreign Policy: 'Integration' and 'Cohesion' in and Beyond the State', *International Affairs*, Vol. 83, No. 1, 2007, pp. 1–17, p. 3.

⁴⁰ Pnina Werbner, 'Theorising Complex Diasporas: Purity and Hybridity in the South Asian Public Sphere in Britain', *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, Vol. 30, No. 5, 2004, pp. 895–911, p. 905.

⁴¹ Kylie Connor, 'Islamism' in the West? The Life-Span of the Al-Muhajiroun in the United Kingdom', *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, Vol. 25, No. 1, 2005, pp. 117–133, p. 127.

⁴² *Ibid*, p. 907.

⁴³ Baran, *Hizb ut-Tahrir: Islam's Political Insurgency*, p. 4.

⁴⁴ *Ibid*, p. 49.

⁴⁵ *Ibid*, p. 19.

and abroad.⁴⁶ Young British Muslims today are challenged with exclusion, marginalization, disempowerment, media bias, political rhetoric, far right hostility, perceptions in relation to British and US foreign policy, a lack of appropriate Muslim leadership in Britain and a regressive interpretation and application of Islam as a reactive rather than a pro-active experience.⁴⁷ British foreign policy which is perceived as unfriendly towards the Muslim world, in the eyes of the young Muslims only justifies what HT has been asserting so far. Lack of community leadership together with lack of intellectual and theological Muslim scholarship makes HT's otherwise naïve and simplistic rhetoric virtually unrivalled. Socio-economic and political deprivation as far as Muslims are concerned is an everyday reality. In addition, theological vacuum is also influential in making HT's discourse attractive to the young Muslims who suffer from also identity issues, Islamophobia, exclusion, racism and discrimination.

HIZB UT-TAHRIR IN UZBEKISTAN

In totalitarian Uzbekistan, where there is no political opposition, HT has sought to occupy the ideological, political and oppositional vacuum.⁴⁸ HT has gradually presented itself as the only viable opposition to the present ruling elites, given also that the secular opposition forces are extremely weak, where most of the opposition is in exile or jail.⁴⁹ Uzbekistan's political and economic policies make young, often middle-income Uzbeks receptive to the message of radical groups.⁵⁰ HT with ideas of social equality and justice finds additional followers amongst victims of the authorities.⁵¹

HT leaflets were first brought to Uzbekistan in the late 1970s by Jordanians and Palestinians who were studying at the region's higher institutions. The leaflets discuss poverty, unemployment, and difficult social conditions of Central Asians. This attempt to manipulate popular dissatisfaction with government policies is part of the party's general philosophy.⁵² In Central Asia the movement puts an emphasis on recruiting jobless young people, ages 17–35, who come from traditional families. They were, however, fascinated with HT slogans of justice and equality, a public order and help to the poor. HT also

⁴⁶ Abbas, 'Muslim Minorities in Britain: Integration, Multiculturalism and Radicalism in the Post-7/7 Period', p. 291.

⁴⁷ Abbas, 'Ethno-Religious Identities and Islamic Political Radicalism in the UK: A Case Study', p. 430.

⁴⁸ Whine, 'Hizb ut-Tahrir in Open Societies', p. 107.

⁴⁹ Svante E. Cornell and Regina A. Spector, 'Central Asia: More than Islamic Extremists', *The Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 25, No. 1, 2002, pp. 193-206, p. 200.

⁵⁰ Andrew Apostolou, 'State Failure and Radicalism in Central Asia', in Baran (ed.), *The Challenge of Hizb ut-Tahrir: Deciphering and Combating Radical Islamist Ideology*, (Washington DC, Nixon Center, 2004) pp. 62-71, p.69. See also, M. Turgut Demirtepe, 'Orta Asya'da Radikalizm, Otokrasi ve Terör', in Ihsan Bal (ed), *Terörizm: Terör, Terörizm ve Küresel Terörle Mücadelede Ulusal ve Bölgesel Deneyimler*, (Ankara: USAK Yayınları, 2006), pp. 259-260.

⁵¹ Andrey Grishin, 'Assessing Religious Extremism in Central Asia', in Baran (ed), *The Challenge of Hizb ut-Tahrir: Deciphering and Combating Radical Islamist Ideology The Challenge of HT*, (Washington DC, Nixon Center, 2004) pp. 72-74, p. 73.

⁵² ICG, *Radical Islam in Central Asia: Responding to Hizb ut-Tahrir*, p. 26.

serves more immediate needs, filling the serious psychological holes of loneliness and aimlessness left in the lives of many Central Asians. In particular, the young acutely feel the lack of a social network, which is neatly provided by HT study circles. HT provides Central Asians with connection to the global Ummah. In Central Asia HT's primary focus is devoted to socioeconomic and human rights issues. In a region with limited access to a free press, HT's discussion of everyday issues provides a much needed outlet for news and opinion. HT continuously promotes a message of 'justice' against what many Central Asians view as their corrupt and repressive state structures. When HT draws attention to the illegitimacy of the existing political order, the group is making a point that resonates with people of many different political perspectives, social classes, ethnic groups and educational backgrounds.⁵³

The second wave of HT expansion began in 1992 but took off in earnest in 1995, when a Jordanian brought HT's literature to the Fergana Valley and disseminated it among the ethnic Uzbek population. While HT is still most active in the Fergana Valley, over the last decade it has successfully spread to the rest of Uzbekistan and to Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Kazakhstan. The precise number of HT members in Central Asia today is difficult to estimate. In general, like other Islamist movements, HT has been less successful in recruiting nomadic peoples (Turkmen and Kazakhstani), who traditionally have been less religious and more successful among the more settled Uzbeks, Kyrgyz and Tajiks. It is therefore not surprising that as of late 2004, HT is strongest in Uzbekistan, with estimates ranging from 7,000 up to 60,000.⁵⁴

The Uzbek regime first began targeting HT in 1997, although it was a little known organization compared with the militant Islamist groups that the government claimed were operating at the time in the Fergana Valley. Mass arrests began in 1998 and were followed by major show trials, primarily in Tashkent and the Fergana Valley. These were almost always characterized by confessions, most likely forced through torture. After the assassination attempt on President Karimov in February 1999, which the Uzbek government blamed on 'Islamic terrorists', including HT, arrests dramatically escalated again. The party itself claims that more than 8,000 of its members were arrested at one time or another during this period. The Uzbek security services claim that 4,200 were still in prison in 2002. The Independent Organization for Human Rights in Uzbekistan puts the total of political prisoners at that time at 7,600, of which 7,400 were 'religious' prisoners, and 4,200 members of HT.⁵⁵

Aspiring for an Islamic identity is not always linked with real knowledge of Islam as the Uzbek case shows: Although 92 % of the Uzbeks consider themselves as Muslim, almost half of them have either no religious education or very little knowledge of Islam.⁵⁶ There was a strong demand for mosques,

⁵³ Baran, *Hizb ut-Tahrir: Islam's Political Insurgency*, pp. 78-81.

⁵⁴ *Ibid*, pp. 77-78.

⁵⁵ ICG, *Radical Islam in Central Asia: Responding to Hizb ut-Tahrir*, p. 33.

⁵⁶ Didier Chaudet, 'Hizb ut-Tahrir: An Islamist Threat to Central Asia?', *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, Vol. 26, No. 1, 2006, pp. 113-125, p. 115.

especially in Uzbekistan, where there were only 89 mosques in Soviet times. Within a year after independence, this number had exploded to 5,000. Similarly, while there were 119 religious institutes in 1990, after about a decade, the number went up to over 2,000.⁵⁷ But due to the Soviet era repression, there was an insufficient number of native imams and Islamic scholars to instruct people about their indigenous Islamic culture and traditions. Central Asian Muslims had to rely on foreign imams and religious texts. Funded by petrodollars and inspired by a radical ideology, outside Islamists filled the vacuum with their own radical religious interpretations. They flooded the mosques and religious institutes and discredited those imams who practiced the traditional, Central Asian form of Islam. Most of the people did not see any difference; they wanted to learn about Islam and accepted any group that declared it was teaching their religion. The radicals were able to succeed as the rapid Islamization of the region occurred without any oversight or regulation.⁵⁸

The lack of satisfactory production of Islamic knowledge paved the way for the de facto monopolization of the Islamic normative sphere by mostly foreign extremist and radical groups in Uzbekistan. In comparison to the other Islamist groups, HT has offered the most comprehensive and easy to understand answers to a myriad of complex questions resulting from the collapse of the Soviet Union. It has provided a holistic answer to the socio-economic challenges facing Central Asians, such as extreme poverty, high unemployment, and corruption among government officials, drug addiction, prostitution and lack of education. Many people, especially the young, have joined HT to learn about Islam.⁵⁹ Indigenous attempts such as Akramiya have been seen as competitors to the state's hegemony and have been harshly repressed.⁶⁰

Recently, the Uzbek authorities have mobilized Muslim clerics to counter with theological arguments HT's ideology. The Muslim Board of Central Asia and Kazakhstan disintegrated in 1992, with the establishment in each Central Asian state of a Muslim regulatory board. The Muslim Board of Uzbekistan assumed the same functions that the Soviet-era board had performed. The state-sponsored Muslim clergy has fully supported the regime's crack down on HT because it views the group as a competitor for the 'hearts and minds' of Uzbeks. Moreover, the clergy is subordinated to the state agencies since they are responsible for the appointment of Muslim clerics and leaders. However, such dependency is reducing the influence of the clergy among religious sections of the population that are inclined to be critical of the regime. HT has seized the opportunity to accuse the Muslim establishment of having abandoned the teaching of pure Islam and of collaborating with the regime.⁶¹

⁵⁷ Baran, *Hizbu ut-Tahrir: Islam's Political Insurgency*, p. 71.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 78-81.

⁶⁰ Alisher Khamidov, *The Power of Associations: New Trends in Islamic Activism in Central Asia*, Social Research Center, American University of Central Asia (AUCA), 2007, (www.src.auca.kg), p. 7.

⁶¹ Emmanuel Karagiannis, 'Political Islam in Uzbekistan: Hizb ut-Tahrir al-Islami', *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 58, No. 2, 2006, pp. 261-280, p. 276.

HIZB UT-TAHRIR IN EGYPT

Despite over half a century of presence in the Middle East, HT has not managed to build a large following among Arab Muslims. HT's influence in Egypt is diminished due to the dominance of the Muslim Brotherhood where it has managed to survive and operate despite the difficulties.⁶² HT could not be influential in Egypt as it is in Uzbekistan and Britain. Similar to Uzbekistan, while the socio-economic and political deprivation and authoritarianism variables exist also in Egypt, there is no theological vacuum where the Muslim Brotherhood has been a solid opposition force with a more or less contemporary, competent and global discourse.

As mentioned above when discussing the Uzbek case, in a totalitarian society where there is no political opposition, HT fills the political vacuum.⁶³ However, Egyptian political system is not a totalitarian, making it difficult for HT to make inroads. Egyptian system could be called a liberalized autocracy which has survived by implementing a system of autocratic power-sharing and state-managed pluralism that gave secular, Islamist, and ethnic groups opportunity to express their views in the public sphere and even in elected, state-controlled assemblies but that did not allow these voices to be translated into a unified anti-systemic or even systemic but oppositional movement capable of threatening the incumbents.⁶⁴ The liberalized autocracy in Egypt implies far more political freedoms than exist in Syria, the former Iraq, the oil-rich Gulf countries, or even in Tunisia.⁶⁵ Egypt has a multi-party political system with several political parties, periodic elections, opposition newspapers, popular criticism of the government and an independent judiciary.⁶⁶ Authoritarian state and strong Islamist groups, among other oppositional forces, coexist in Egypt. The communication channels between the Egyptian regime and the opposition are well-established and they are never totally closed.⁶⁷

Thanks to the existence of political opportunity structures available, if limited, to political opposition, a convergence between the conservatives and the state emerged that has put limits on the positions available, not only neutralizing the anti-systemic extremists such as HT but also containing the Islamic left and circumventing the secularists.⁶⁸ Moreover, repression contributed to democratic learning by creating incentives for sustained interaction and cooperation between Islamist and secular opposition leaders.

⁶² Baran, *The Challenge of Hizb ut-Tahrir: Deciphering and Combating Radical Islamist Ideology*, pp. xi-xiv.

⁶³ Whine, 'Hizb ut-Tahrir in Open Societies', p. 107.

⁶⁴ Daniel Brumberg, 'Islam is Not *the* Solution (or *the* Problem)', *The Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 29, No. 1, 2005, pp. 97-116, p. 106.

⁶⁵ Holger Albrecht, 'How can Opposition Support Authoritarianism? Lessons from Egypt', *Democratization*, 2005, Vol. 12, No. 3, pp. 378-397, p. 389.

⁶⁶ Asef Bayat, 'Revolution without Movement, Movement without Revolution: Comparing Islamic Activism in Iran and Egypt', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 40, No. 1, 1998, pp. 136-169, p. 168.

⁶⁷ Albrecht, 'How can Opposition Support Authoritarianism? Lessons from Egypt', p. 393.

⁶⁸ Salwa Ismail, 'Confronting the Other: Identity, Culture, Politics, and Conservative Islamism in Egypt', *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol. 30, No. 2, 1998, pp. 199-225, p. 202.

Muslim Democracy is more likely to emerge when Islamist and democratic forces sense a common interest in protecting the democratic process from the military.⁶⁹ Over time, both Egyptian leftists (Marxists, Nasserites, and independents) and Islamists, neither of whom had previously accorded a high priority to democracy, gravitated toward a democratic agenda, in part to assume the moral high ground vis-a-vis the country's authoritarian leaders and in part because, as victims of repression, they had come to value democracy more than in the past. The emergence of a shared democratic agenda created new incentives for leaders on the Islamic right and the secular left to break out of the ideologically insular networks of Weltanschauung politics and become active in a cross-partisan campaign for political reform.⁷⁰ Thus, HT's anti-systemic and anti-democratic rhetoric has not appealed to the masses.

Islamist opposition is also tolerated in Egypt to a certain extent. The Society of Muslim Brothers (MB, *Ikhwān al-Muslimun*) emerged in 1928 during Egypt's liberal era (1919-52), when the secular-nationalist Wafdist Party and the Royal family ruled the country. The MB was founded by Hassan El-Banna.⁷¹ The spread of Islamic sentiments pushed the Egyptian secularists to give way to Islam.⁷² The national crisis manifested in conflicts with foreign influence, especially the defeat in the 1967 war with Israel, class incongruity, and individual anomie among the educated rural migrants are the major factors which furnished the rise of the Islamist movement since the 1970s.⁷³ Structural factors, class interests, the contradiction between socio-economic development and political autocracy are the main sources of conflict. The ultimate goal of achieving majority support within the political system has been the main characteristic of political Islam's development from 'Islamic resurgence' to 'Islamic participation'; a process which is likely to continue after the failure of Islamic militancy becomes more and more obvious.⁷⁴ Both internal (socio-economic and political) and external (resentment against western domination and the Israel factor) played crucial roles in bringing about Egypt's Islamist activism.⁷⁵ While the radicals articulate a clear denunciation of society as jahiliyya (state of ignorance before Islam) and of government as un-Islamic, the conservatives anchor their discourse in popular traditions with concerns about the afterlife,

⁶⁹ Vali Nasr, 'The Rise of 'Muslim Democracy', *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 16, No. 2, 2005, pp. 13-27, p. 18.

⁷⁰ Carrie Wickham, 'The Path to Moderation. Strategy and Learning in the Formation of Egypt's Wasat Party', *Comparative Politics*, Vol. 36, No.2, 2004, pp.205-228, p. 225.

⁷¹ Husain Haqqani and Hillel Fradkin, 'Islamist Parties: Going back to the Origins', *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 19, No. 3, 2008, pp. 13-18, p. 14.

⁷² Asef Bayat, 'Revolution without Movement, Movement without Revolution: Comparing Islamic Activism in Iran and Egypt', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 40, No. 1, 1998, pp. 136-169, p. 161.

⁷³ Saad Eddin Ibrahim, 'Anatomy of Egypt's Militant Islamic Groups: Methodological Note and Preliminary Findings', *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol. 12, 1980, pp. 423-453; see also G. Kepel, *Muslim Extremism in Egypt*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986).

⁷⁴ Jan Stark, 'Beyond 'Terrorism' and 'State Hegemony': Assessing the Islamist Mainstream in Egypt and Malaysia', *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 26, No. 2, 2005, pp. 307-327, p. 325.

⁷⁵ Bayat, 'Revolution without Movement, Movement without Revolution: Comparing Islamic Activism in Iran and Egypt', p. 36.

the spirits, and rituals.⁷⁶ Islamist revival manifested itself in a vast spectrum of groups, encompassing, on one end the violent militants, the non-violent and gradualist Islamic coalition, and the individualist Sufi orders. At the other end, it also included the state's Al-Azhar and a number of other institutions of the state, including the Ministry of Awqaf and the Supreme Islamic Council.⁷⁷ Estimates put it that, in 1993, 170,000 mosques existed in Egypt of whom only around 30,000 were sanctioned and controlled by the state; roughly half of all private voluntary associations (some 15,000) are supposed to have religious foundations.⁷⁸

In Egypt, unlike Uzbekistan and Britain, there is not an Islamic theological vacuum that HT can benefit from. Islamist radicalism has frequently been described as a clash between extremist Muslims and the authoritarian state. Islamists have fundamentalist views, but so do parts of the regime.⁷⁹ Islamist extremism has been a deeply fractured force and has often maintained links reaching deep into the political establishment.⁸⁰ The conflict between the regime and the Muslim Brotherhood is not a struggle between a secular state and Islamic fundamentalism. The incorporating nature of the Egyptian state made space for both secular and religious trends and symbols. Legal codes, for instance, are partly secular and partly Islamic.⁸¹ Article 2 of the 1971 constitution established that the 'principles of the Islamic Shari'a shall be a main source of legislation,' and since a 1980 amendment elevated Shari'a principles to 'the main source of legislation,' the Brotherhood had been able to position itself as a protector of the constitutionally. The State licensed secular and Islamic financial institutions. It funded secular and religious schools and universities. It allowed both secular intellectuals and clerics airtime on State owned media. And officials appeared regularly on both national festivals and religious celebrations. So on the societal and State levels, what Islamists were calling for was not really a return to religion per se, but it was rather an appeal to accept their ideological interpretation of Islam. What is interesting, however, was that the Brotherhood did not publicly denounce the State as an enemy to Islam, calling for a political revolt against it.⁸² Conforming to its strategy of working within existing institutions, the Muslim Brotherhood found in the professional syndicates an arena to expand its ranks and develop a strong base

⁷⁶ Ismail, 'Confronting the Other: Identity, Culture, Politics, and Conservative Islamism in Egypt', p. 200.

⁷⁷ Bayat, 'Revolution without Movement, Movement without Revolution: Comparing Islamic Activism in Iran and Egypt', p. 155.

⁷⁸ Holger Albrecht and Eva Wegner, 'Autocrats and Islamists: Contenders and Containment in Egypt and Morocco', *The Journal of North African Studies*, Vol. 11, No. 2, 2006, pp. 123-141, p. 134.

⁷⁹ Albrecht, 'How Can Opposition Support Authoritarianism? Lessons from Egypt', p. 386.

⁸⁰ Stark, 'Beyond 'Terrorism' and 'State Hegemony': Assessing the Islamist Mainstream in Egypt and Malaysia', p. 317

⁸¹ Hazem Kandil, 'Islamization of the Egyptian Intelligentsia: Discourse and Structure in Socialization Strategies', *Symposium: Democracy and Its Development*, University of California Irvine, (Irvine, CA: Center for the Study of Democracy, 2008), p. 3.

⁸² *Ibid*, p. 3.

among an important segment of society.⁸³ Private voluntary organizations, which are usually connected to mosques, have been established by the Brotherhood, the Jihad, and the al-Jamaat al-Islamiyya. The development of these kinds of organizations is of strategic importance to the Islamist groups. For instance, structures such as 'the mosque complex' are engaged in expanded activities ranging from preaching and gathering believers to the provision of social services. Mosques have also served as headquarters for militant groups.⁸⁴ The state, the Islamists and the secularists engage in producing the 'true Islamic' position.⁸⁵ From the state's perspective, there is a need to discredit the radical Islamists and subvert their attempt to transform the status quo.⁸⁶ In its response to the Islamist challenge, official Islam, as represented by al-Azhar, the Mufti, the Ministry of al-Awqaf (Religious Endowments) and the state-affiliated sheikhs, has endeavored to articulate 'the correct' understanding of religion, producing the necessary support for the existing political structure. With the increased concern over issues of culture and morality, this state Islam has focused its attention on social mores and directed its attacks against 'un-Islamic' ideas and cultural expressions. A cultural and religious battle -the battle over the definition of religious orthodoxy- thus has ensued between the state (including the religious establishment) and its Islamist opponents.⁸⁷ The state also has made use of cultural production and the media in its battle with Islamist groups over the terms of religious orthodoxy and public morality. The policy of co-opting and neutralizing the Islamists consists of producing an alternative understanding of Islam.⁸⁸ The state attempted to co-opt some of the Islamist opposition by making public life more visibly Islamic.⁸⁹ Thus, it sponsors religious newspapers and devotes more television and radio airtime to religious programs.⁹⁰

In such a setting, it is obvious that there is not a theological vacuum that HT could easily fill, unlike Britain and Uzbekistan. A recent statement by a former HT leader shows the vital importance of theological vacuum for HT. On 11 July 2008, Majid Nawaz, who was a longtime member of the British leadership committee of HT, addressed a Policy Forum at the Washington Institute. In 2002, while studying in Egypt, he was arrested for his membership in the HT and was imprisoned in Egypt until 2006. He returned to Britain upon his release and publicly announced his withdrawal from HT in 2007. He told that:

⁸³ Ismail, 'Confronting the Other: Identity, Culture, Politics, and Conservative Islamism in Egypt', p. 200.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 201.

⁸⁵ Salwa Ismail, 'The Paradox of Islamist Politics', *Middle East Report*, No. 221, 2001, pp. 34-39, p. 36.

⁸⁶ Salwa Ismail, 'Religious 'Orthodoxy' as Public Morality: The State, Islamism and Cultural Politics in Egypt', *Critique: Critical Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 8, No. 14, 1999, pp. 25-47, p. 33.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p.33.

⁸⁹ John B. Alterman, 'Egypt: Stable but for How Long?', *The Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 23, No. 4, 2000, pp. 107-118, p. 111.

⁹⁰ Ismail, 'Religious 'Orthodoxy' as Public Morality: The State, Islamism and Cultural Politics in Egypt', p. 33.

I left for Egypt to study Arabic where I was imprisoned by the Egyptian government. My experience in prison was a critical step in my de-radicalization. While in prison, I learned Arabic and was able to read classical Islamic texts as well as interact with intellectuals and dissidents, such as Egyptian opposition leader Ayman Noor who challenged and debated my ideas.⁹¹

In sum, in Egypt, there are not ideological, political, oppositional and theological vacuums –the case both in Britain and Uzbekistan again- that HT could take advantage of.

CONCLUSION

This study has focused on the transnational self-declaredly anti-systemic and anti-democracy HT that aims to establish a global Muslim state by non-violence means. HT's ideology mainly attracts the youth. Thus this study looked at the factors that pave the way for the youth attraction to HT. We elaborated on factors such as socio-economic deprivation and political deprivation. Linked to these, the paper also looked briefly at related phenomena –based on the context- alienation, marginalization, Islamophobia, social exclusion, authoritarian political structures, repression, political opportunity structures, and foreign policies towards the Muslim world. Another important factor that we analyzed in this paper was theological deprivation. We hypothesized that theological deprivation is the major factor that paves the way for the youth's attraction to HT.

To test our argument, we employed comparative qualitative analysis and studies three different countries with different characteristics: Britain, Uzbekistan and Egypt. The reasons these countries have been selected as follow. Britain and Uzbekistan are known to have many members of the HT and HT is very active and visible in these countries. While it is banned in Uzbekistan and in many European countries, it operates legally in Britain. Having Britain in this study facilitated to observe if repression is really the root cause of HT's radical and extremist ideology's appeal to the deprived and disgruntled youth. What Britain and Uzbekistan have in common is the theological deprivation that the Muslim youth in these two countries suffer from whereas in Egypt there is no such a problem even though socio-economic and political (as far as Islamist opposition is concerned) deprivations are mundane realities of daily life. Thus, Egypt in our study worked as a test case to see if theological deprivation is the major factor of HT's wide appeal and influence.

There is no doubt that HT takes advantage of socio-economic and political deprivations, marginalization, Islamophobia, social exclusion, authoritarian political structures, repression, political opportunity structures, and Western foreign policies towards the Muslim world. But our analysis of three countries has shown that these factors alone cannot explain why HT is influential in some

⁹¹ Majid Nawaz, *The Way Back from Islamism*, Policy Watch 1390, Special Forum Report, (Washington DC: WINEP, 2008), pp. 1-2.

countries but not in some others where these disadvantages as far as the Muslim youth are concerned also exist. Our comparative analysis of the three cases suggests that theological deprivation is the major factor that paves the way for radicalization of the Muslim youth when socio-economic and political deprivations already exist. A further study may look at a case where there is theological deprivation but not socio-economic and political deprivations.

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